ゼロの使い魔 15

〈忘却の夢迷宮（ラビリンス）〉

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫 J

Novel Illustrations

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ゼロの使い魔15　忘却の夢迷宮（ラビリンス）

ハルケギニアに残ることを選択したサイトは、タイガー戦車を駆りシェフィールドが率いるヨルムンガントの“軍団”の撃退に成功する。ルイズの危機を救い、再び絆を取り戻したルイズとサイト。「でもでも、そんな妄想ゆるさないんだからね！」傍から見たらただのいちゃいちゃな喧嘩を繰り広げつつ、つかの間の安寧を楽しむ二人だったが、ロマリア教皇ヴィットーリオ、そしてガリア王ジョゼフの「虚無の担い手」の策謀は、再びルイズたちを騒乱へと導くことになる――。ハルケギニアとサイトたちの未来はどうなる!?　冒険ラブコメファンタジー第15巻！

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『魔法薬売りのマレア　千日カゲロウ』『ストライクウィッチーズ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』『遠く6マイルの彼女』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『ゼロの使い魔』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ。大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
イラスト仕事歴は
「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）
「ふたりはなめこじる」（電撃hp）
「神曲奏界ポリフォニカ ぶるう」シリーズ（GA文庫）
「悪魔憑きの目覚め」（富士見ドラゴンブック）
「ゼロの使い魔」（MF文庫J）
などです。
初のイラスト集「兎塚エイジ Zéro ゼロの使い魔イラストコレクション」（メディアファクトリー）も好評発売中。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔 15

〈忘却の夢迷宮（ラビリンス）〉

ヤマグチノボル

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「雪風」の二つ名をもつ、口ベな少女。
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ヤマグチノボル

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Chapter 1: Carcassonne

Residing on the Southern parts of Gallia, Carcassonne is a medium sized city around 400 miles west of the capital Lutèce.

On the surface, that is.

Spanning 50 metres wide, 2 miles long, this narrow but long city was built hanging on a cliff like a bridge. If someone views it from the sky, it would almost look like a giant winding snake.

Roofs made from layers and layers of red tiles, which were the snake's scales. Because of this, the city also has an alias named Maroon. Containing a population of around 2000 citizens, this city has a long history.

This city has successfully prevented **Aren people()** from touching its streets numerous times. In its streets today, a familiar and its master were frantically running.

"Stop! In the name of the Queen's official Louise Françoise I order you!"

Saito panted heavily, running for his life on the stone paved roads. The pedestrians looked at this pair of fascinating master and familiar accompanied by Romalian army with astonished expressions.

Louise, wearing clothes of the academy, launched herself and grabbed Saito's waist tightly. "Thump!" the two fell onto the ground.

"Let, let go of me!"

"It's time I teach you a good lesson!"

Louise sat on top of him and pointed at his face, her face thoroughly red.

"I'm sick of it! You say it everyday!"

Yes. It has already been two whole weeks after the Myozunitonirun led Golomonta army have been crushed.

During this period, Louise had been blaming Saito non-stop. That is because of.... the content of the memories about Saito flowing into Louise's heart.

Unable to stand Saito's departure, Louise pleaded Tiffania to erase all her memories about Saito...

Unknown if it was the bond between a familiar and its master that's hard to break, or Louise's desire for her familiar..... anyhow those memories flowed into Louise's heart when they kissed.

From Saito's perspective, the couple's memories were rebuilt, including all sorts of other stuff. It can also be said that this memory does not only consist of things that happened in reality, but also of Saito's daily fantasies.

For teens at Saito's age, his "fantasies" can only be about one thing.

"I'll let you off for now about the 'education in the toilet' a while ago. It may not be something good, but it's understandable"

"Understanding that, you've grown as well"

Saito teased happily, Louise turned even redder

"B-but, but..... But!"

At the last "but", Louise clenched her fists.

"'Closing eyes at the court' is not negotiable! Impossible!"

Louise beat Saito to a pulp.

The Ondine Water Spirit Knights, Tabitha and Kirche extended their heads from the balcony of the tavern to watch the last part.

"Really.... this is almost becoming their daily routine."

Guiche chuckled while gulping down wine.

Reinard pushed his glasses up from slipping and said

"But if you think about it, Louise is pretty troublesome. Saito fights so hard for Louise.... even if he had some weird dreams, it isn't exactly unforgivable."

"Reinard. Do you also like doing perverted stuff to girls as well? Huh~ even someone as stubborn as you too...."

Being made fun of by Gimili, Reinard blushed

"It's not like that! If...if you are a male, you would think of these things more or less... I don't have a high interest in these things, just of normal interest...."

"Then would you confess these kind of things to normal girls?"

Reinard gulped down his glass of wine silently.

With this, an intense discussion on the topic of Louise being easily angered and their pity on Saito began.

"Honestly, Louise is just like a child!"

"Saito has an impressive endurance, don't you think? If I were him, I couldn't have handled this."

One member of the forum shook uncontrollably with anger.

That boy was none other than Malicorne. Using one hand stabbing and twisting his food cruelly, he said

"Is there a problem with your eyes?"

"Uh? What do you mean?"

"It's not what it looks like."

Malicorne jabbed his fork with hanging pieces of meat at Louise and Saito. Louise was beating Saito and Saito was defending against her attacks. It's a common sight around the boys.

"What does that look like then?"

Confronted with his mates' doubt, Malicorne tipped his head in the same direction again

"Watch again closely."

The band looked again at Louise and Saito.

And was kept in that posture staring.

Although Louise was punching Saito..... the punches only landed on his chest lightly. Saito accepted her attacks and was wearing a carefree face, just like comforting a child.

Louise paused her punches and bit her lips as if flirting and turned her head away from him. She then used her index finger to hold down Saito's hands and started twirling.

Saito pulled Louise close, mumbled for a while in her ear, then Louise bowed her head embarrassingly and said something.

"......Idiot. Must be saying 'you naughty boy' or whatever....."

Malicorne lip-read Louise's script with a tone almost sighing. Such highly skilled techniques.

"You would make me do even more d-d-dirty things..... Don't be stupid. Is this all..... Really?.....Really? Of course it's true..... But, Louise doesn't like you fantasizing like this....."

Malicorne spun around, about to puke. He quickly regained himself and jumped up, crying out with a fierce face.

"Using an ironic expression to put this makes this sound laaaaammmmmeeeeeeee!"

Malicorne suddenly saying things so willfully gave his counterparts sitting next to him a scare.

"Which means that the main dish is yet to come? Signs of flirting with each other, this, this kind of thing..... as a noble, it should be done in absolute secrecy....."

"Ma-Malicorne....."

Guiche stood up and grabbed his mate's shoulders.

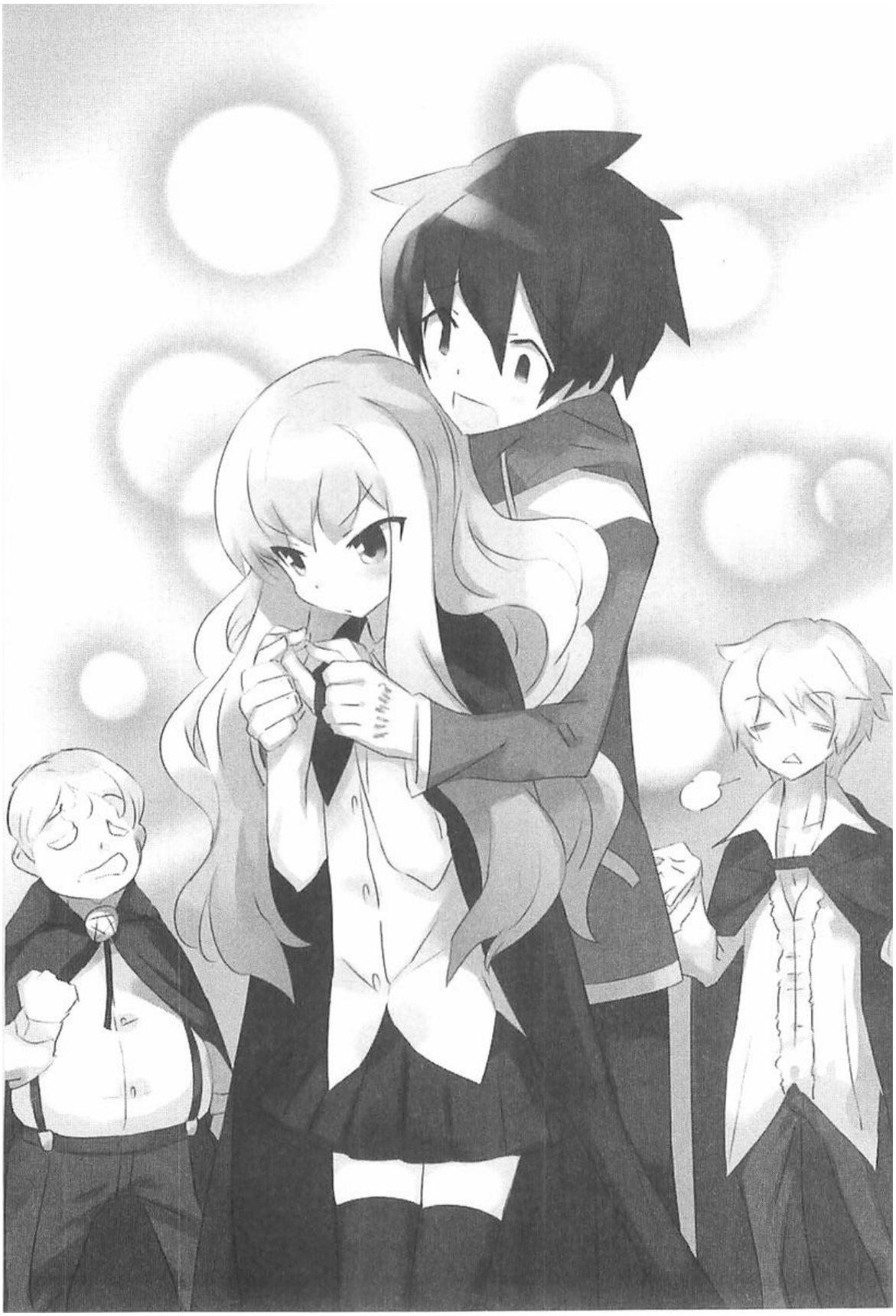
"Ah!"

Malicorne's fist hit Guiche's cheek.

"Putting on this kind of show so brazenly, they really fear nothing, do they?"

Saito and Louise ignored them and went back into their own world again shamelessly. Only they would think that fighting is a part of flirting.

Louise was hugged tightly by Saito from behind, her hands joined by Saito's, acting all shy. Saito stared at Louise's face from the side, but every time Louise would turn away in embarrassment.



"Welll.... I know males are a completely different creature from us.... because you were by my side all the time."

"Hmmmh? Louise, how should I say, that is only an extreme case....."

"Why are all boys like this, thinking these things?"

"How should I explain it, that...."

Saito shook his head. The tension at the scene was like a matured apple about to be fall on the ground, but bounded so tightly by iron wire that it was almost cut into the flesh. Must correct Louise's misconception, even though it's not a misconception at all. However, that would be too much for an illogical Louise to handle.

The girl you like falling in love with yourself, and also in an environment that spells "do whatever you want" out loud..... yet Saito just had to screw things up at the crucial stage.

If he doesn't come up with something quick..... after some frantic processing in his brain, Saito, being stuck in a stalemate, came up with a shocking excuse.

"I say, actually there is a little devil living in my heart. That guy always imprints these heinous thoughts into me."

Louise's shoulder's tensed up

"Little devil?"

"Mm. That guy would tell me to do a lot of things with bad intentions, is a terrible guy who needs to tempt even me. Even so, I am still fighting with him everyday. It's hard to deal with since it's full of charming lies..... No, it may be charming, but it only works on men."

Louise hated these kind of excuses. Although she feels really sorry for Saito's wild fantasies, but in reality, she isn't as angry as she seems. A half is actually used to cover up her shame, as for details, we'll leave it for later. Saito being so conscious of her had made her very happy.

This is the obvious truth, but he just had to tread on "a little devil in his heart",

these kind of lame lies. Even if you had to lie, find something better. Or does he not take me seriously? That's right, it must be it. Huh, there must be a limit to believing someone to be dumb

Louise focused all her energy into the tip of her foot. With this in addition to the torque generated by turning her body and kicking it out, it would unquestionably land on Saito's weak spot..... in other words, between his legs. Just as Louise was considering this, Saito opened his mouth and continued.

"Hmm, letting the little devil speak for himself might be good. But anyhow, my feelings for you are real."

Last time Saito was at the inter-class grand baseball competition, he had never made a homerun no matter how hard he tried. On the contrary, this hardly spectacular sentence had successfully made a homerun pitched by Louise.

The white ball flew over the wall, out of the stands, and fell towards Louise again, knocking her out in the head.

Louise's soft body lost its source of power, and leaned on Saito.

"Put aside the little devil talk. Say, I really like beautiful things. The same goes for romantic ones. Therefore, the washroom stuff, you are whose dog whatever, I hope you will never think of these things, How should I say it, it feels like it would dirty important pieces."

Saito kept nodding and hugged Louise close to him gently.

"Understood. I will try my best."

"If it really is like that, I would be very happy."

"Let's make up."

"Mm, alright."

Saito lifted Louise's jaw. Louise closed her eyes like she was angry. Just as Saito's lips were nearing close .....

A sudden gust of wind from behind pushed the couple to the ground.

"What!"

Saito jumped up. Behind him was a giant "ghost" standing with his legs crossed.

"It's me, Malicorne....."

The couple trembled with fear as they observed the slightly chubby teen telling them his name. The reason he looked so huge was that the fury emitting from his body was too shocking to get a clear view.

"......Ma-Malicorne!"

"That's right. My name is Malicorne. I will be representing the citizens of Carcassonne to punish the flagrant 'heretics' with the hammer of God!"

Malicorne said, laughing darkly.

Saito and Louise crawled backwards in fear, attempting to flee. The rage leaking at such a massive scale from a dot ranked mage was enough to scare the legendary void user.

Thunderclaps sounded in the air. His fury had triggered lightning. Although lightning magic is mainly composed of wind elements, it almost belongs to top level spells, which a dot ranked Malicorne wasn't supposed to be able to use. Yet still, around his surroundings, lightning sparks fired all around.

The spell's power had magnified because of his jealousy.

After Malicorne had finished chanting, a cloud condensed above their heads.

"St-stop! Malicorne!"

A lightning bolt hit Louise and Saito right on. The two held each other, drenched in the enormous amounts of current, and fainted.

Even so, Malicorne's madness has still not been dispersed and kept stomping on the couple's bodies.

Her fiery red hair waving in the wind, Kirche raised her eyebrows at the look on the Ondine Knights as they rushed out to stop their hot-headed friend.

"Oww. Those guys, no matter where they're headed, lack a sense of emergency"

She commented, astonished, spreading her arms open.

"Speaking of which, at the start I was thinking 'how would this turn out', but I never could have imagined that we're already here now."

The day Pope Vittorio announced the commencement of the "Crusade" was in the month of **Lutos ()** , **Teraz()** week and **Ingot()** day. To now, it has already been two weeks. The Romalian Army was only able to conquer the main part of Gallia because of the help from a real rebellion out of the dual-use fleets which triggered this war in the first place.

As Myozunitonirun's **Golomonta** army was overran, fleet captain Claville himself awoke from his nightmare.

The King may have promised him the "land of Romalia", but that did not justify his actions either. Therefore, in this case where a "Crusade" was even started, Halaweiluin completely lost his will to fight. Gallia may be powerful, but making the God these people believe in as a symbol for enemy would result in a complete failure.

Resolving to make this decision, Halaweiluin reacted to it rapidly. After shaking off the Romalian fleet's chase, he flew fast to San Marin. There, he honestly spoke of Gallia's conspiracy, then asked the entire crew if they were willing to surrender to Romalia.

Although Halaweiluin may not be a natural-born commander, the time he spent as a soldier was well-fit for his job. The number of crew members supporting his actions were surprisingly high, due to the fact that many of the soldiers already had their opinions to the ill-prepared operation. In the end, almost all of them agreed to rebel.

Officially becoming a real "rebellion", the news of the dual-usage fleets rising up against its home country spread across Gallia in no time.

The unsatisfied subjects of Joseph, who were already holding back their desires, left the capital as their official response. The Crusade and the rebellion of the dual-usage fleets.

These two incidents, to the distrustful and unhappy congressmen, were the perfect timing for them to overthrow the Government,

Like a chain of dominos, the Marquess of the land directly connecting Gallia and Tiger's Highway **Funsaludar ()** were the first to cooperate with the San Marin areas.

Marquess Funsaludar have held a deep grudge against the government for reclaiming his land the year before the last.

In addition to announcing his defiance, he made a declaration to Romalia, giving them permission to allow troops to pass through and offered aid from volunteers on his land. Guarding the borders of Romalia and Gallia for many years, the well-known Funsaludar's betrayal successfully persuaded counterparts of shaky loyalty to his side consecutively.

Eventually, the lords of southern Gallia, quite some distance from the Capita,l followed suit and allied themselves to the rebels. Now, the Romalian army were able to audaciously walk into their lands holding a Crusader's flag without staining the ground with a single drop of blood, up to this city of Carcassonne.

Unfortunately, the chain of dominoes also ends here.

Across the **Lelian()** river flowing through the north side of Carcassonne, an army sworn loyal to Gallia awaits. Its army is of size 90,000. Even when half of the country has abandoned the Gallian flag, they were still capable of recruiting an army this humongous size, proving that its title of being the most powerful country of Halkengia is well deserved.

Including the volunteers from the rebellions, the Romalian army has only 60,000 soldiers. They may be carrying the flag of a Crusade, but to overcome the disadvantage of the large difference in army size isn't just any easy task. Although the dual-use fleet are already part of their force now, but this doesn't mean that they can march directly into the Capital without putting up a good fight either.

On the other hand, in comparison to its advantage in army size, the Gallian army has a low morale to fight. Swearing loyalty does not mean that they do not know of the dangers through swinging wands towards the Crusaders.

All sorts of different reasons knitted together, the result? Both armies stood across the river glaring at each other.

"Oh, that reminds me, why aren't you going to save your knight? Look, he's being fried by lightning with his master"

Though Kirche questioned, a young girl hair shining bright blue- Tabitha continued to read her book without a sound.

Kirche froze gazing at Tabitha. Originally she thought that her friend was no different from usual. But after a few more glances, instinctively something says otherwise. It's so minute that only Kirche who always sticks near her can observe.

"You..... are nervous right?"

This is the center of Gallia. The person wearing this kingdom's crown is her father's largest foe..... Not long ago Tabitha herself was almost driven crazy by this uncle king.

Her most hated enemy may still be attempting to get closer, but her presence is no longer as dismissed as previously. Today she brings forth an army capable of reversing the tables.

Feeling nervous is expected.

"No. Not at all"

Tabitha shut her book then stood up, afterwards, walking away at a quick pace.

Kirche glanced at the balcony across this one. In between the two steep cliffs, enjoying the amazing view of Carcassonne is one of the best sights you would want to see before you die. Below the cliff is a field of pastures, sprinkles of the radiant sun reflecting upon the Lelian river. On both shores the deadly shadows of the Romalian and Gallian army.

Afterwards, Kirche focused on Saito and the others. The Ondine Water Spirit Knights were taking care of Saito and Louise burnt black by Malicorne's lightning.

And eventually her eyes landed on Tabitha's silhouette.... To other people she is as common as she can ever be, like any other day, but Kirche can see through her disguise easily.

Something was alive inside her heart.

What might it be..... though Kirche's woman instinct might have noticed, but the things that's troubling Tabitha is still a mystery to Kirche.

Resting her jaw on her hand, Kirche thought, tilting her head sideways.

"Wait, if it's that child..... I don't think she's that simple"

Standing on one side, a Romalian guard walked behind Tabitha, never making a sound. These people will tag like a shadow on any of Louise's friends as soon as they lay foot outside the apartment. Their watch over Saito and Gallia's descendant of the King Tabitha are even stricter.

Whether they drink wine and chat, or picking up fights in a bar, they do not care at all. However, no matter the time, or where they are headed to, the guards will stick to them like bees to honey. They may not follow their targets inside their room, but will stand guard outside for the whole time.

In name, it's to "protect the important people".....

"How is this different from a hostage" Kirche moaned, then corrected herself

"No.... I should have said, they are hostages"

Not long after Malicorne's commotion, Louise and Saito returned to their bedroom, and sat down on the bed and let out a breath of relief.

Louise stuck out her tongue towards the Romalian soldier outside her door.

"What do they mean 'please don't make too much trouble, Halkengia's Saint', huh? Saint? Didn't you make up the title on your own?"

"Heard you were very excited and accepted it"

Saito gave Louise a cold stare after commenting. Louise blushed

"Be-because.... I couldn't help it. Back then I thought it was the right decision"

Louise explained shyly. With only memories about Saito gone, all the rest were perfectly left behind in good condition. It is an undeniable fact that back then Louise saw herself as one of Halkengia's nobles, and it is a must to follow Romalia's justice.

"You really..... if I chose to go home at that point, those people planned to kill me on the spot! Thank goodness I'm not a coward, so I can live til now."

Saito said with relief, a contrast to Louise's tremor of anger

"This incident, I will never forgive them! The Pope dared lie! What is this world made of!"

"Umm, that wouldn't have broken the contract even so"

"How so?"

"Those guys promised you to 'send me back', but did not ensure my survival. It's just that"

"Is not! This is quibbling!"

Louise crossed her arms and made a pouty face.

"Ahh, don't get too angry yourself"

"How can you be so calm! I have never been so ashamed of myself as a Romalia Pilgrim! It's just like switching factions with the desert devil!"

Louise quietly complained. If other people heard it, it may become a scandal.

"Is it not good? Now both of us have what we want from each other. As long as we assist them, those people will not do anything weird again. So, before we defeat Gallia, let us take advantage of those guys as well"

"Huh. I wonder if it's so convenient"

"Oh it'll be fine. Did princess also went back to Tristain by doing so"

That's right.

After the last appearance of Henrietta, hearing the incident from Saito and the others, she bit on her lip hard, and said with a deep expression to Saito and Louise

"Leave it to me. I will gamble on my own life to stop this foolish 'Crusade'"

Her face was filled with incredible determination, exactly the same as the solemn look she had on her when she ran out of the conference room, just hearing the news of Albion's army headed towards them.

"Although her majesty has decided to carry this heavy load for us..... but if it were deemed 'unnecessary', then so be it. The Romalia bunch are not so generous to share with us any of the details."

Louise may have said it worryingly, but Saito was still bright as ever

"No problem"

"Why!"

"Because Halkengia's Saint is the hero who destroyed the entire Golomonta army on Tiger's Highway. It may be an embarrassing name, but to those people, you are unquestionably one of their most important chess piece. Which is also why they will not undermine your hard earned reputation. All of these things affect their morale, you see."

Louise looked at Saito motionless.

"Are you alright?"

"Hah! You actually said it sensibly"

Well, Saito's words did make sense.

"I said, this Ondine Knight vice-captain isn't just here for looks. There are a lot of things you can't win by waving swords or wands, so I decided to learn a little"

While saying this, Saito's face had an inspiring expression.

Wow.... his looks can get this cool. Louise heart pumped so heavily that she could feel it from the outside, making her face red while looking at Saito.

"What?"

"No-nothing"

Louise flustered and turn her head away, putting her fists under her knees and hung her head. Seeing Louise act weirdly like this, even Saito realized how shocking his words just now sounded to Louise.

Saito held his fists, cheering "Good! Good!" over and over again in his heart, thumping with joy. *That really came out of nowhere, ha. Louise is certainly not very capable of handling things like this.....How should I say it? Reliable? I have already grown to be able to say these things naturally!* Saito praised himself, full of himself.

Ho ho, it was definitely the right choice not to go back....

A shy Louise looked as if she were trembling. She is not someone who can easily express her feelings.....But, just because that she is more righteous than anyone else, it's also the reason why she will never change her decisions once made. That's the kind of stubborn girl she is.

It's also why Saito was attracted to her.

Louise, compared to before, had changed a lot. Towards the Henrietta that she used to blindly trust and Romalia Pilgrims, she would speak out loud as soon as she feels that something is not right.

On the other hand..... she underlying parts have not changed at all. The gentleness and care when taking care of Saito in a coma for 3 days and night after being beaten by Guiche, her fearlessness against facing threatening Golomontas, these areas of her have not changed at all.

Moreover, the attractive face of hers capable of making one's heart restart again..... Louise bit her lips lightly, her long long eyelashes occasionally shaking up and down.... This living miracle assembled from these components' perfect reflection, has modeled Louise into an incomparable beauty.

Saito's mind was in a very peaceful state.

Liked by the girl you like, Saito couldn't think of any moment more pleasing than this one.

His throat suddenly drying up, Saito was driven by the urge to push Louise down on the bed.

Louise will definitely not refuse. Animal's instinct has made Saito aware of this point.

Saito gently lifted Louise's face. A peach coloured hair beauty obediently closed her eyes. Not knowing if she's planning to let Saito do whatever she want or to cover up her shyness, Louise pouted as if angry. Revealing the answer, her cheeks shaded in the same peach colour as her hair, letting anyone see through her feelings right now. Saito easily stuck his own pair of lips onto hers, Louise hugging him tightly back.

Louise's cute little shoulders were trembling, making Saito feel from the bottom of his heart Louise's cuteness. This small body guarded by Saito, from now on, ever and ever.....

Saito's memories once again flowed into Louise heart through the overlapping lips. Most likely it'll be Saito's imaginations again, but Louise has already decided not to be shocked no matter at what she sees.

After all, males are that kind of creatures. They have a reason different from her to act. It can't be helped once in a while.

This time, the "memory" flooding her is, the image of them at the Academy in her own room on her own bed, sleeping with Saito and Siesta together.

Annoying..... even when Siesta is sleeping just right aside, he still reaches for me. Speaking of which, he didn't kiss me when I'm asleep, did he?

Louise's heart cried out. *No such thing. This is a disgrace! A disgrace!*

Saito in the memory extend his hand to Louise, gently shaking her.

Ohh. So he was trying to wake me up.

I do not have this kind of memory....., so this is only part of Saito's fantasies. At this moment Louise suddenly discovered a thing. Even her memories now.... aren't they all from Saito's perspective?

Then how I 'so strongly determine' that this did not happen in real life? Thinking of this, an uncountable number of memories..... her own ones, all ones about Saito has awoken.

"And why is that?"

this is something that cannot be explained just by using the bond between a master and his familiar.

Unfortunately..... Louise's sudden query was blow away by the contents of the memory.

Because in the memory, Saito also gently shook Siesta awake.

"Then the three of us....."

Louise dropped out of Saito's embrace and pushed him aside expressionless.

"Wha.....Louise?"

Saito stared at Louise in disappointment and confusion. Although Saito can take a guess at the reason, he did not know which one. To make a long paragraph short, boys of Saito's age have an unlimited number of wild fantasies.

"Wha-what?"

He may have guessed the correct reason, but is uncertain of which one. Despite knowing, Saito still asked Louise

"Toilet, court and whatever I have already endured it, but I just can't stand being treated like everyone else!"

Watching Saito still racking his brains for "which one is it?" Louise unforgivably kicked at Saito's face with the back of her shoe using all her might.

That's right. Stowing away so many fantasies!

Louise sat down, crossing her arms and facing Saito with her back and blamed

"Boys, are really stupid"

Tabitha was lying on the bed in the room assigned to her. Because of the knocking sounds, Tabitha straightened her body.

".....Who?"

For some reason, Tabitha was very looking forward to this.

The one knocking did not reply, but opened the door. Tabitha winced her eyes.

Standing there with the Ondine Knight's cape on is Saito.

Tabitha pulled her sheets up. She is only wearing pajamas now.

".....What?"

Responding to Tabitha's question, Saito walked up to the side of the bed, and sat down next to Tabitha.

"I'm sorry to disturb you this late in the night, but I have something to say"

"Something to say?"

Tabitha asked for more while her chest was shaking with expectations.

"Unn. I mentioned it to you before, is about the Ondine Water Spirit Knights. We finally came to Gallia. Your hated foe is right inside this Gallia kingdom. We want to avenge for you, therefore wouldn't it be more convenient if we wore the same coat of arms?"

So this was the "thing". Tabitha felt a hint of disappointment.

"Unn. Join us!"

Saito looked at Tabitha and grabbed her hand. Tabitha nervously flung away his hand. In Saito's eyes colours of sadness can clearly be seen.

"My bad..... Said something that would be difficult for you. Sorry"

"It's fine, don't mind"

Why she threw away Saito's hand, did not imply that she does not want to join the Knights. Of course, it's not a sign of rejection either. Just.....feeling shy, but afraid to display this kind of feeling. Therefore Tabitha also turned away.

Awkward silence fell around them. Tabitha usually barely talks, therefore if the other also goes silent, there wouldn't be anything to say between the two of them.

"Actually there's one other thing" Saito's voice broke the stillness.

".....What?"

"That...., just wanted to see you"

Tabitha felt her heart contracting to an unbelievable size, but did not show it on her expression since she is trained this way. Only subtle difference is the tiny trembling in her voice.

".....Why?"

"How should I say it. Must be because I like you"

"But, don't you already....."

"I like you even more"

Saying like this, Tabitha couldn't keep a poker face anymore. The long suppressed emotions revealed on her face. Her cheeks grew hot, maybe they're already red. Tabitha would do anything to cover her face with her hands, but was caught and pulled towards Saito. Naturally, her face stuck on Saito's chest.

Her lower jaw caught by Saito, irresistibly, Tabitha closed both eyes. The nearing lips kissed her eyelids. As Tabitha slowly opened her eyes....., dream ended.

Her eyes widens, her surroundings just as dark. Tabitha glanced at the mechanical clock placed on top of her closet, 4 a.m. in the morning.

"...Dream."

It was only after a considerable length of time before Tabitha made this kind of dream. Ones where Saito appears and makes his love confession....

Tabitha was very clear when did she start making these dreams.

Going forth to Albion to welcome Tiffania, and battling with Myozunitonirun's Golomontas...

Tabitha once even kissed Saito in order to trigger an exhausted Louise's emotional waves.

Of course, that one was to make Louise feel jealous, did not contain any other meaning. Saito is a knight she should help. Never did she every imagined of having these feelings upon Saito, and never will either.

But.... since that moment, Tabitha started dreaming about Saito. These dreams, little by little gave Tabitha a change in emotions.

Every time she meets Saito, her heart felt like it was being bounded tightly.....

Tabitha calmly denied that feeling in her heart. The knight she was determined to serve would easily simulate love like emotions. Her own situation is none other that this.

Tabitha only knew these knowledge on the surface.

But similar to this time, there was another incident happened once that made her almost deny these things as well.

It was when Saito and the Ondine Knights were peeking at the girl's shower..... Tabitha saved the trapped Saito from the furious girls.

In the dining hall where they were hiding, holding their breath, Tabitha told Saito "don't look at me". She may have said that because she was naked, but she wasn't ashamed afterwards by the knight she serves seeing her body either. Although the she back then decided to make this sort of decisions, but yet she told him "not to look".

Tabitha understands the reasoning for that.

Because if Saito sher her skin....., deep inside her heart something would start to accelerate. Tabitha hugged her knees and bit her lips.

"Is because I was too excited?" Tabitha asked herself. It because she's too excited about being near Lutèce where Joseph lives, that's why the frequency of these dreams also increases.

But..., compared to the idea of revenge once all over her brain, the time spent

thinking about that dream was much much longer.

".....Why is this? Am I in love?"

Tabitha recalled all the topics she knows to define her current state. So far there has not been a single book she does not understand. That's right. Not even if it's a book about what she thinks.....

Yet....., Tabitha recalled all the books she have read, and there was not a single one describing a method to confirm what she is actually thinking.

Tabitha dully looked at the direction of the window. Sylphid's face appeared inside the window frame. With a "flap", she turned to human form and came in from the open window.

"You should not change to human at this kind of place"

"Now's not the time to say this! Sister, why are you showing this kind of expression!"

"...What?"

"Seriously! I am the Sylphid always protecting sister! Let's leave that for now! Sister, your expression shows that there's obviously something in your mind! Look! Your face is all red! What kind of dream did you make, tell it to me!"

Sylphid lay naked in the room, a face full of expectations and excitement.

"Then"

Sylphid stood up and put her hand on top of Tabitha's head.

"Then, who would be the person Sister is secretly dating in her dreams"

Sylphid's question was extremely direct. Embarrassed, Tabitha did not reply but covered her head with her blankets. Sylphid snuck in the bed and laid next to her, once again showing her face to Tabitha.

"Say it."

"None of your business"

"Of course it is, it's very very important, no, this may be Sylphid's long awaited moment! Leave it to me! I Sylphid will definitely help Sister succeed"

"Don't be mistaken. There's nothing like this"

"Was not! From ancient times to now, if you're in the state of 'seeing each other in dreams', it will turn into 'only seeing each other in dreams'. To not let this end, there must be some sparks between you, otherwise you will be hurt, otherwise how are you going to lay eggs"

"We don't lay eggs"

"It's only a different vocabulary. Anyways, say it. A little?"

Sylphid jabbed Tabitha's face.

"Talk"

In the end, although this conversation continued all the way til morning...., Tabitha insisted not to tell his name to this stubborn familiar.

Chapter 2: The Knight Contest of the Sandbank

Across the river of Lelion flowing north of Carcassonne, the Romalian and Gallian Armies had been at a stalemate for the last 3 days. In this period of time, flying across the banks of this narrow river reaching less that 200 metres, are not flying arrows or bullets, nor is it magic spells, but "words".

"Hey, Gallian suckers, convey a message to your damned old man!?"

A Romalian soldier yelled.

"Which stinking disciple is screaming all around!?"

Someone in the Gallian camps responded.

"Which wasted country is this? There's nothing to eat at all! Bread is no different from clay, and drinking wine is more like drinking vinegar!"

"How would any stinking disciple know taste! Just wait here a while, I'll make you full from eating lead cannonballs!"

"Hey, what is that person afraid of even crossing a river talking about?"

"Does no one on your side know how to swim? Go back to your home and come back after you learn how to splash in water!"

Endless cries of both sides swearing at each other, occasionally one or two hot-headed noble would wade into the center of the river and chop at each other on an small rock.

The winner would always wave his army's flag around, enjoying his faction's cheers, boosting morale. The loser would hang their head in shame, until another

unsatisfied challenger came forth..... and the loop goes on again and again.

Whenever a noble is wounded, or even dead in the challenge, two small boats, one from each faction will go and take them back. A unanimous rule of "allowing to attack that boat," is currently getting knights of both factions excited.

Right now, waving in the winds on the island, is the flag of the Gallian army. The cheering Gallian army sent out cries of provocation. In the middle of the Romalian army, viewing the other side of the bank, Gimili said without thinking

"What, compared to when we were on Albion's island, this is more relaxing."

"The strength is always highest at the start."

Malicorne concluded as if understanding philosophical.

Hearing him say so, Reinard said

"It must be because everyone felt a hint of guilt."

"Guilt?"

Saito asked, and Reinard nodded to him.

"Well, although this is a 'Crusade', the enemy aren't exactly heretics, nor do they belong to any new religion. We are all followers of Brimir. No one knows what are we actually fighting for. They claim they have allied with the elves, yet so far we haven't seen a single one. In addition, being ex-Gallian warriors, half of Gallia are supporting us without knowing our cause for war. They themselves must be very muddled right now."

"Hmm....."

"Yet still, despite all the reasons here, the description 'Crusade' has already been announced, it would be impossible to change it now. In their eyes, we are considered as invading their territory, the name of a 'Crusade' is none other than an excuse to conquer Gallia."

"Therefore, this awkward stalemate continues. God, if this war ends here right

now then it would be the dumbest decision ever, not a single one of the dead soldiers will be able to rest in peace."

After Saito has pointed out his own views, Reinard revealed a stern face and corrected

"No, the longer this is, the worse it will be for us. We are, after all, inside enemy territory. Suppose the Gallian Southern Vassals on our side right now find themselves at a disadvantage. If they turn against us, it would be troublesome."

"You don't mean trouble, but destroyed, right?"

"My points exactly"

As straightforward as possible, Reinard answered.

"Is there any way to prevent this from happening?"

"In the next battle we must obtain a decisive victory. Simply said, no matter what, we must completely defeat those guys on the other side of the river."

Looks like I should've insisted on bringing the Panzer here Saito thought.

The energetic Panzer which defeated the Golomontas in battle was left behind in the streets of Aquileia.

But then again, even if he had insisted, things won't go his way either. Just moving that Tank is a task difficult enough. If forcefully driven, some parts might actually go haywire.

If this fries up, then it's done for. There's no backup support, making a temporary one using Alchemy would take too much time.

Even under the help of this world's best mechanic -- genius engineer Colbert, driving the Panzer from Romalia borders 800 miles to here is impossible. There would not be enough fuel, not to mention that you have to be extremely lucky to prevent damage to the parts.

Transporting it with the "Orient" is also out of the question. Every time the battlefield changes, repeatedly "Loading and Unloading" will spend more energy

than it's worth.

Just by having the tank in its hanger, the consumption of Wind rocks will increase exponentially. Also remember that there would need to be 20 experienced wind mages. All of that trouble for only a small Knight's branch. Being at a disadvantage themselves already, to spend too much time and energy would not be the best solution. Therefore, Saito eventually had to agree to leave it there.

Different from airplanes, in this world without roads or rails, to transport a tank without it being bashed up is a daunting challenge indeed. Well, the challenge here is currently taken up by Colbert, thinking like hell in the company of the Orient in the streets of Aquileia.

Because of the short notice, there was not enough time to ask Colbert the overall idea on how to prepare this. Even for a person like Colbert, an effective method to transport a tank, isn't really some idea one can easily grasp hold of.

Then again, if the tank is magically in front of Saito right now, facing an army of 10,000, what on earth do you think a tank can do?

Moreover....., even towards the enemy, Saito did not want to point those large guns at somebody made out of blood and flesh.

The only thing he can rely on right now, is Henrietta. She had sworn to stop this war as she was about to begin her journey back to Tristain

"Please do not do anything rash. Stall as much as possible."

And so, Saito and the others, sitting in the middle of the Romalian camps, are electrocuting their gray matter right now, trying desperately to buy time....

What if another horde of Golomontas appeared again?

--Then we might as well flee. It's worth a try using the AK-47 or Derflinger, I guess. Saito suddenly felt a shiver sent down his spine.

"So the is the tremor of excitement from the legendary warrior when preparing a battle?"

"No, out of fear. Speaking of which, where's Guiche?"

Malicorne extended out his finger.

Tracing the direction of his grubby finger, Guiche was inside a dinghy rowing to the small island, carrying a face smiling like a kid's. The Romalian army released ground-breaking cheers and applause.

"That idiot!"

"Our captain really likes the attention doesn't he..... it looks like, he had a few sips of wine."

Gimili said in a depressed tone.

"The noble he's going to face already defeated 3 of our best men."

"That certainly is, a knight of the **four hundred flower beds, Duke Socaron ( ).** He's a noble considered as a famous hero around here. Either way going to end up bad...."

Reinard sighed, watching the bald, muscle covered man waving his flag high on the island.

Saito urgently pushed away the gathered soldiers and nobles, rushing into the river.

Wading through the flowing water, Saito climbed aboard Guiche's dinghy. The soldier at the bow immediately moved away to give him a spot.

"Oh, Saito. Here to cheer for me?"

There was no need to say more, Guiche is dead drunk. His red face can be seen regardless of the layers of make up one can apply on him. Another obvious hint is the wine bottle in his left hand.

"What are you doing! 'You must control yourselves when I'm away', didn't the Queen advise us before she left!"

Saito yelled at the drunk. Guiche twisted his body a little, then hugged his knees.

"That's right, that is quite possible.... But, see here, Saito. Look at the arrogance the Romalian and Gallian army are boasting. Here we should give them a good performance of the Ondine Water Spirit Knight's bravery and power, and our names will be praised on forever and ever by our grandchildren and their grandchildren!"

"Who's going to be your grandchild when you die!"

"Hmm. Well, you're here as well. Things won't turn out so bad."

Saito cowered his head in anguish. He thought this guy have changed to some extent, but now it looks like that he is the same Guiche down to his roots. Always wanting to show off and brag, this guy will probably never change for the rest of his life.

This scene on the dinghy was observed by the bald enemy. Yells of curses began to rang again

"What, expecting defeat so you want to fight two on one? As expected of the cowardly Romalia!"

Guiche put on a fearless smile and yelled back

"We are from Tristain, and are here to teach you ruthless Gallian about etiquette!"

"That thought never came across me."

Saito mumbled. Of course, his voices of complaint were covered by the shouts of provocation on both sides.

"Tristain? Good, dogs of Romalia, show me everything you've got! Knight of the Gallian Flower Beds , Piero **Flanders (••)'** awaits you here! Who's first? Or do you wish to fight me together? Whatever you want!"

Guiche nodded deeply at Saito.

"Vice Captain, it's about time."

"Me!? You don't want to look cool anymore?"

"My apologies, I seemed to have drank too much."

Guiche shamelessly burped. Sounds of jeering and provocation continued to fly everywhere. Having no choice, Saito stepped forward.

"Name and rank!"

"Kingdom of Tristain, Ondine Water Spirit Knights, Saito Chevalier De Hiraga."

Hearing that, the strong bald-headed man showed a look of surprise.

"The Hiraga who stopped an army of 70,000 alone in Albion?"

"Correct."

Duke Socaron turned his head around.

"Hey! Everybody! Listen up, this guy seems to be the rumored 'Albion's Hero'!"

Deafening cheers sounded from the Gallian army. Looks like Saito is pretty famous even on enemy ground. Whichever side the cheers came from, they were probably out of respect towards a hero.

"To be able to cross swords with you, it is my honor. Please!"

The smile of Duke Socaron's face vanished, as if saying he had not given all he's got in the previous battles.

Saito voiced thoughts of despair in his brain. Gallia really is as incredible as people say, having such chivalrous knights. They will have to face an army containing even more of these knights.

Saito unsheathed Derflinger. Simultaneously, the Romalian soldiers roared deafening cheers again.

"Oi, partner. From when did you become the protagonist on the stage? What an incredible audience!"

"No choice. Since we're already here, we might as well drive those guys on the other side of the river into despair."

Duke Socaron quickly finished his chant, forming blades of winds flying straight at Saito.

Saito has long gotten used to a magician's battle, swiftly dodging it and charged into the enemy.

Duke Socaron was not slow either, beautifully levitating above the edge of Saito's sword and jumped behind him. Again, Saito continued to approach him under the non-stopping blades of wind. Even if his opponent is only a swordsman, Duke Socaron did not let down his guard or underestimate him. He knows that his opponent is not simple at all.

"Can't believe this large body can be so agile!"

Between the bellows of both armies, Saito was unable to get close to his opponent's body. In his chase, a wrong step into sand and stones caused him to lose balance, throwing Saito to the ground.

"Chance!"

Duke Socaron made his move at Saito and unleashed his ice bolts. Although fast, but not fast enough. Saito used Derflinger to defend himself, and subsequently absorbed the spell.

"What?"

The stunned Duke Socaron's wand was shattered in an instant. At another glance, Saito's AK-47 held single-handed was fairly smoking.

"Th-the gun hit the wand?"

At that distance? A gun which an accuracy like this, it was the first time Duke Socaron have ever heard or seen. Stunned to the core he unconsciously knelt down.

"....I'm sorry, but, you also used flying tools, so we're even."

Romalian army burst out with thunders of cheers. The soldier on the dinghy immediately handed Saito their flag.

"I will be planting my flag on here, as some sort of prize for winning. Take your flag back with you. Thanks for your hard work."

Facing the still dumbfounded Duke Socaron, Saito comforted. Guiche, on the other hand ran over and started tying him up.

"Wh, what are you doing?"

"Hey hey, he is now captured by you, which idiot would honestly return him back."

Between Guiche and the tied up duke, a negotiation suddenly began.

"2000!"

"Too high, 1000."

"1500!"

".....Hmm, well, ok, deal!"

Duke Socaron waved his hand to the people on the Gallia side.

Very soon, a dinghy full of bags was rowing towards this way. The dressed men coming ashore seemed to be servants, and made difficult effort in placing 3 large leather bags in front of Saito. After confirming the contents of the bags, Guiche released the ropes tying the duke up.

Duke Socaron boarded the dinghy filled with large bags just now, and rowed back to his side.

"What does this mean?"

Saito couldn't help but ask.

"What else could it be, of course it's ransom."

"Ransom?"

"Ah, the loser is the prisoner, if he wants to be released he must, of course, pay ransom. This time he is a duke, in the markets they are worth in units of

thousands. Wahh, this time we're going to be rich~"

Guiche patted Saito's shoulders laughing. So the bags were filled with shining gold coins. Saito was unable to accept this in such a short moment, and shook his head.

"Well, since we've already profited from it, let's go back. Standing here feels weird."

"Hey hey, this can't end like this."

Guiche pointed to the Gallian army across the river. Hot-headed commanders were crying out

"Take down that guy! Whoever it is! Taken him down and I'll pay him 3000 écu gold coins."

The soldiers were just as excited, pushing each other away from the dinghy crying "Me! Me!"

"Oh, Oh, duke, earl..., That's the Father of Marquis **Honbaleui ()** !....You, keep it up! I believe after tonight we can build a city!"

And so, Saito being forced and blinded by money and glory had countless fights with Gallian nobles.

The Ondine Water Spirit Knights began to gather around and do their own work.

Reinard flicked away on his abacus, calculating ransom fees.

Malicorne and Gimili were busy queuing up the competitors. Others started a gambling stall, using the dinghy to transport large amounts of money to and fro between the shores of Gallia and Romalia camp, displaying gleeful grins.

It wasn't long before the bounty on Saito's head in the Gallia camp has already risen to 10,000 écus. Ten or more nobles have challenged Saito and came back in tatters.

"Let me take a break...."

Saito huffed and puffed, already at his bodily limit. Although no one may know, there is a time limit for Saito to become Gandálfr.

Guiche yelled towards the Gallia camp:

"Lunch break!"

Delievering to the Romalian camp on a dinghy were a bountiful of delicacies and exquisite wine. A table was put up by the soldiers who suddenly changed into waiters. All of the teens couldn't be merrier, and in a crowd mixed with people from both armies, a happy lunch began.

Reinard told Saito with a serious face

"Saito. Listen, just win two more times. This way, the 80 **Alubon ()** (1 Alubon) castle on Tristain's countryside will be ours!"

A faint dollar sign emerged from his eyes, Saito unwillingly sighed. His comrades in charge of the gambling stall begged

"Saito, please, don't lose, even if you die, you Must win, the odds are at 30 to 1, if you lose we'll go bankrupt"

The terribly excited boys cheerfully started sing Tristain's antics:

[Translator's Note: <Worst nightmare. The lyrics never rhyme if you translate directly. They already sound like crap in Chinese so..... I'll skip the lyrics]

"I quit."

Saito suddenly said, interrupting the plain, dull melody. The boys exchanged looks with each other

"Huhhh???!"

"Huh yourself. Why don't you go yourself, I have no time to act in these kind of farces! I'm not a bulldog!"

Saito slammed his hand down on the table.

Saito only agreed to take up the challenge intending to lower Gallia's will to

fight. What a joke, now they are even more eager to do so. Besides, there was no reason to make enemies at this kind of place, and less to say, popularity...although it was already a bit too late....

"We are here to defeat Gallia's King and help Tabitha, not make a living."

"What would these fights be worth if they didn't make money"

Guiche claimed. The others echoed with "Exactly exactly".

"Moreover, other than earning money you can get famous and popular, a whole different world from now!"

"I don't want to be famous, Louise would be angry as well."

"Idiot, that Louise, just gift her with delicate dresses and shining jewelry and she will open warms arms to anything. She would think 'it can't be helped' even if you did something like having fun with other girls."

Saito's shoulders unconsciously moved a little. It was not missed by Guiche.

"I understand, totally understand, you are an good honest person, but occasionally even you would like other girls"

"Ack!"

Saito covered his face with both palms supported by the table.

"Oi Oi, this isn't something that can be helped! It's not your fault! This is, the so called, instinct, like 'when you go hungry you would' that kind of nature! It may be difficult for most women to understand, but there is one way to relieve yourself to a certain degree..... that is money."

Shamelessly moving his silver tongue, Guiche pushed Saito into his own belief.

"Really?....That."

"Uhh, I swear on it, under the name of "

Guiche grabbed Saito's hand tightly. Saito would have normally ignored it, but at this moment under the threat of Louise's jealousy, he painfully replied

".....I understand, then, just one more time. No matter what you say, I am already at my limit."

The boys stuck out their thumb and exchanged looks, nodding their heads. Guiche stood up, faced the Gallian camps and yelled

"Heeyy! Gallian nobles, our hero says, he will only be taking one more fight. Send out your best, the higher status the better~~!"

The organized Gallian nobles turned into instant chaos again, quarreling again with yells of "I'll do it, I'll do it".

"You really are a celebrity now, Saito"

".... Seriously, then the next match would be even more difficult, wouldn't it?"

"How's that bad, wasn't that what you wanted?"

"Oh, looks like they have reached a decision."

Standing out on the opposite shore, is a tall noble wearing a black mask, a whole body covered in rough leather. If he weren't wearing a cape, one could barely recognize his status as a noble.

"What, don't just get anyone if you can't pay the ransom!"

"At least he's still wearing a cape."

"A poor noble, I guess"

"-Sigh, just our luck, it's this kind of skillful but poor kind of person. They are hard to deal with."

The Ondine Knights all displayed disappointment. Unfortunately, it's the last match and forfeiting is not a choice. Saito plucked out his sword and made himself ready.

The opponent calmly climbed down from the dinghy, then gave a small bow.

Gimili called out

"Name!"

"I don't have a name worth speaking of."

"What? Are you here to show off?"

Malicorne may have considered him as nothing, but Saito still prepared himself for anything, just in case. After "training" with hundreds of magicians, the true strength of this opponent can be spotted just by observing his stance.

This guy was even more powerful than Duke Socaron. Out of all the matches so far, he is undoubtedly the strongest.

Stress and tension filled Saito up completely, a drop of sweat trickled down his forehead.

Like so...., much time passed.

"What's wrong, Saito, beat him up already."

Calls of condemns came from his lazy teammates.

Still, Saito was unable to make a move,....use gun, probably shouldn't.

"Not coming? Then here I go."

The man didn't bother to chant spells, lifting up his wand and charged at Saito. Looks like he wants to fight Saito as a swordsman fair and square.

Like a sabre used by the army, one appeared from his wand in an instant, giving off a bright lime glow. It's the "blade" spell, something mages use to procure a sword from their wands when going through close combat. Of course, the feel and weight of that would be different from a real one.

Because of his mask, Saito was unable to determine if he was chanting or not, and suddenly came the "blade" spell.

Surprised so suddenly, Saito had no time to evade the slash but to directly block it with Derflinger.

Lime sparks flashed everywhere, making Saito feel as if he was about to be

crushed.

"Saito!"

Being held down by a magician at swordsmanship, it's the first time for Saito. Looks like the opponent is quite confident at close battles.

Saito felt a wave of fear for a second. As figured, the world is large..... Stalling an army of 70,000 had made him think too highly of himself. In Gallia, Duke Socaron just now or the mysterious man in front of him at the moment have really.... made Saito feel ashamed at his confidence in himself.

Anyhow, losing is not an option for Saito in this one to one fight. Saito caught his opponent's pressure and diverted it to the ground on one side, and raised his own sword.

Yet, by the time he had realized, the opponent has disappeared.

Lifting his head up urgently, he saw the man floating in the air as if weightless. Utilizing the gravity downwards, he smashed his entire weight downwards with his wand.

CLANG!!!

A sharp metal colliding sound pierced the air, Saito had again caught the opponent's slash, but was pushed backwards by the opponent's weight. The man did not miss this chance, continuing to push forward.

The man with a metal mask kept closing the gap between himself and Saito, almost touching each other's face. Apparently a mage, yet refusing to use magic, is he attempting to win through strength? What a weird man.

In the standoff with this un-mage-like mage, Saito was overflowed with sweat full of anxiety and confusion plus fear...

"Keep holding it at me like that!"

A small voice from deep inside the mask said. Saito couldn't respond to his sudden conversation.

"Wha--"

".....Quiet down, you said you are from Tristain?"

".....Ye,yes."

Trying not to display much change in his expression, Saito replied to his questions without much thinking. "....Then, Charlotte,.....No, Chevalier Tabitha is someone you know right?"

As soon as he finished, Saito understood the situation.

He is a spy of Marquis Orleans planted in the Gallian army!

"....now, just in time for us to arrive."

The man distanced himself with a jump. Following his lead, Saito also jumped towards him, pretending to swing his sword with all his force.

The man also gave an imitation of catching the smash with effort, to the crowd's eyes, this looks very much like a standard fight to the death.

"....Inside the bag for ransom is a letter, please relay it."

"....Yes."

Without hesitation, the man lost his strength, letting Saito fling away his wand above their heads and stabbing into the ground again.

"I lose!"

The man knelt to admit defeat.

"Phew! Saito, for one second I feared the outcome!"

Guiche and the others rushed consequentially.

"Now the remaining is the ransom"

Guiche said. Saito pointed something out for him.

"Huh?"

"It's already done, just take it and leave."

The servant dropped the leather bag in front of Saito. After checking its interiors, Guiche exclaimed

"Hey hey, why are they all copper coins! How is this supposed to be ransom? You may not look very generous, but you are still a noble, carrying the title of one. How would someone as good as you be worth this much?"

"Enough already, shut up!"

Saito gave the man a standard knight's bow, and the man returned with a Gallian bow then left.

"It's finally done."

Using a telescope on top of a small hill somewhat south of Carcassonne to monitor the returning Ondine Knights on a dinghy, Kirche claimed, her side accompanied by Louis, Tabitha and Tiffania.

These 4 have been observing them from since the start.

"Louise, your knight really is something, as far as I can see he has already won against more than 10 people in a row, reaping lots and lots of money. You should occasionally let him buy you a dress or whatever."

Kirche advised Louise beside her, the latter turned her face away

"I don't want these things!"

"Oh, what wrong?"

"....Because, he would definitely give it to others as well."

"Of course he won't, he's obsessed with you."

"Not true! That guy, in dreams...."

Louise cut off her own sentence, for what reason did she had to honestly answer Kirche's question.

"Dream? Hmm, that sounds interesting, share it with us?"

"No, there's nothing to share about!"

Kirche grabbed Louise and started her full body tickling attack.

"Tiffania, Tabitha, hurry up and help"

After some considerations, Tiffania eventually joined in, thinking that Louise would feel better if she said it out.

Tabitha, on the other hand...., turned around and walked away.

"Tabitha?"

Kirche was still for a moment, then returned to reality and started seriously tickling Louise. If Tabitha's strange attitude is due to Louise's familiar...., more the reason she should spit everything related out.

Kirche's tickling techniques were godlike, after continuous invasions into Louise's most sensitive body part, she finally gave in and begged

"I'll talk, I'll talk!"

After hearing what Louise had to offer, Kirche bursted out with giggles.

"What's so funny!"

"Because, it Is funny. Thinking about others in fantasies, cheating, these you should forgive him, it's not like he really did that."

"It's even worse than what he did in reality! Doesn't this imply he was dreaming about other girls while with me?"

"I say, Louise"

"What"

"The creature so-called men, is something that no matter how much they love someone, they would still uncontrollably look at other girls. Getting so angry over all of these small issues, you body might not be able to handle it."

Listening to Kirche blatantly lecturing on the subject of boys and girls, Tiffania blushed and turned away.

"This theorem I also understand....."

"Then change them into actions."

Louise replied "Uhh" thoughtfully for quite some time before pouting. Seeing Louise like that, Kirche started to notice Tabitha.

If, my assumptions are right...., whose side should I support? Isn't that obvious, although I must say sorry to Louise, Tabitha is my closest friend. But then again, other than Saito, Louise has no one in her eyes, if he was really taken away, giving up her life isn't exactly impossible in her case, and I bet no one would want to see that.

This is one tricky case, Seldomly doing so, Kirche joined her hands and started getting frustrated.

"This-and-this-and-that, that guy..... always makes these kind of dreams, he must be hoping to, with girls other than me,.... do that, that kind of things."

Continuing in this direction, Louise began to get all fired up, squeezing her small fists and biting her lips. Looking at Louise acting this way, Kirche was reminded of what she used to be, mad in love...., heartbroken when breaking up....

"Louise."

"Must have also done that kind of thing to Her Highness, who knew that similarly as a woman even I am awed by gorgeous Tiffania's what was also there as well, you better start speaking honestly how many times have you used those pair of large breasts to appear in that dog's dreams, it must have been a superb, incredible night for him....."

"Louise!"

"What!"

Louise fixed her deadly stare at Kirche.

"Say, I want to talk to you for a little bit."

"Go on..."

"It's that, the Saito you wish for and the real Saito is different, do you understand?"

"What do you mean?"

"Saito is also a normal boy. He neither exists to think of you 24 hours a day, nor be there whenever you want him to be. Yes, he may be your knight, but he is not one of your 'items'"

"I know."

"No you don't. that's why after seeing his true self, you discovered he is not what you imagined and are furious over that, am I wrong?"

"What, don't say it as if you know everything."

"But I Do know, because I was in your position before, if he wasn't thinking about me with the same intensity, I would also unconsciously become irritated."

"Ugu...."

"However this is wrong. Whether it's his defects or points he's lacking, you must accept all of it, like all of it. That is real love. I believe it myself."

Kirche exclaimed, an expression on her face as if looking at a distant place.

From a pasture extending from the river of Lelion to the streets of Carcassone, one must go through a steep valley of length around 100 mails.

Using magic or Sylphid, she could have went over this in one leap, but indulged in her own thoughts, she decided to take a walk, climbing the twisting roads constructed on the cliff.

While climbing step by step on the limestone staircase, Sylphid was circling above, lightly poking at Tabitha's hair, her eyes as if talking "why don't you use me".

Ignored by Tabitha completely, Sylphid flew around again above her for a few circles, then mumbled

"Climbing stairs so long will tire you to death sooner or later, ride on Sylphid and you can fly over it in a second."

Yet still, Tabitha gave no reaction at all, silently walking step by step on her way.

Spotting a man waiting in the resting spot halfway of the stairs, Sylphid immediately flew away, it can't let anyone see itself speaking.

Standing on the flight of stairs around the corner, is a Romalian priest, Pope Vittorio's familiar, Julio of Vindálfr.

"Oho, Tabitha."

Two eyes glittering of different colors, Julio greeted towards Tabitha. Looks like he knew Tabitha would pass this area and was waiting long ago.

Any normal female would have long been mesmerized by this handsome face and eyes sealing up a lake of intriguing secrets. This, however, had no effect on Tabitha. With giving any kind of a response, she passed by him.

"My apologies, there was a mistake in addressing, Princess Charlotte your highness."

Tabitha stayed still and turned her head around

"You know?"

"Uh, this grand land of Halkeginia, there is nothing we Romalia does not know of."

"Nor is there any conspiracy you can't do?"

"How so?"

"Treason of the Southern lords, if it wasn't prepared a few months ago, an invasion of this speed would be impossible to realize."

"The wise eye spots these things, you are absolutely correct, then, the following content I am about to suggest, I suppose you already guessed as well."

Tabitha's eyes suddenly emerged a tiny glow of light.

"If you think all is under your control, it will be the biggest mistake you've ever made."

"At least all is still under expectations, including camping here at Carcassone, as well as how to break through the enemy across the river and march all the way to Lutis...."

"Want me to become your puppet?"

"No, we're just helping a country of long history welcome her master home."

"You only want to defeat my Uncle, not to help me."

Tabitha coldly described.

"This would be difficult, you wouldn't let us help you avenge no matter what?"

"Because it's personal."

Julio sent Tabitha's shadow off with a warm smile, in an environment that makes one irresistible to hum a song, he scratched his head.

To finish the Crusade, King Joseph must be defeated as he can never be an ally, and to do that, it is inevitable to ask for "the destined one's" help, the one supposed to be the next King, orphaned offspring of King Orleans....

If she is willing to reclaim the title as King, standing at Romalia's front lines, there would be nothing more effective than having "the destined one". If so, even the Southern Gallian lords, superficially joining our army yet unwilling to fight

at all, may really start to put an effort into it. The ones currently still struggling to make a clear choice and observing from one side would likely join the Romalians, plus another rebellion within the enemy's army is something of high possibility as well.....

Right here facing each other at Carcassonne, will be the best stage to unveil "the destined one".

Yet unfortunately, Tabitha had no intention to help them at all.

"Sigh....., Why are all Halkeginia Princesses so stubborn? Fortunately, no matter how it turns out, I swear you would eventually dance to our Romalian praises, Princess Charlotte your majesty."

Chapter 3: A Shaken Mind

The night Saito displayed his skills at the sandbank....

Louise was in her bedroom awaiting Saito's return. Hugging around one main street, praised as a heavenly spot for vacations, Carcassonne has countless hotels. At this moment, they all of the customers they were serving are almost entirely Romalia soldiers. As a special team from Tristain, Louise and the others were also assigned a hotel.

After the previous event, Louise hurried back to the hotel. Despite her efforts in anxiously waiting, Saito just doesn't seem to appear.

At the instant the door creaked open, Louise's face was immediately replaced by one shining golden lights. Standing in front of the door, was the golden haired Tiffania. Still dressed in the robes of a nun, the hood perfectly hides her elven ears. There cannot be a more suitable dress for her, because as one of Founder Brimir's nuns, no one felt the need to request her to take of her hood.

"So-sorry, it's me."

Tiffania twisted shyly and softly apologized.

"Why would you need to be sorry."

"Eh? Oh, no, I thought you were waiting for Saito, seeing Louise like that."

"Was not."

Tiffania sat down on the bed next to Louise's side.

"Seems like it has became very serious", Tiffania said uncomfortably.

"Really, being so relaxed even under these situations."

"So-sorry."

"I don't mean you. It's Saito, we are on enemy's ground. In the middle of streched bows and drawn swords Mr.Know-It-All decided to play a dueling game with the nobles. Sheesh, what was he thinking."

Tiffania seemed to uncomfortable listening to Louise's rambling.

"Do you understand? The bells for a crusade have already rang, there aren't any way we can back out of this. Her highness has already ordered 'we find our own way out', what is his mind filled with!"

Louise did not know of Saito's situation, who was, behind the scenes, forced to duel unwillingly, therefore complained.

Picturing the sight of a mere river stopping the progress of the two armies sent a shiver down Louise's spine.

Joseph may be a terror that cannot be left ignored, but the only choice does not lie with an act such as war. The more Louise ponders on the subject, the more this doesn't feels right.

"....Sorry."

"Like I said, why should you be sorry."

"It's all my fault, if I hadn't erased Louise's memories, things wouldn't have turned out like this...."

Louise grabbed Tiffania's hand.

"Not true, I'm the cause for this. Being 'Aquelia's Saint' and to trigger a war was the condition for my choice to send Saito back...."

With memories about Saito have been erased, Louise was not the same self anymore, yet the fact that she had done everything consciously is undeniable, which is why she believes she does not deserve forgiveness either.

"No matter what happens, we must stop this war. Only in that way may I bear the title of being 'Aquelia's Saint', it's what a real saint should do."

"I'm going to help."

Tiffaina said directly into Louise face.

"Thank you."

"No, part of this is for my own cause, war between elves and humans is a nightmare, carrying the blood of both species I should do whatever I can."

"True,..... I feel that, being able to be friends with you is such a great thing."

Hearing Louise's praise, Tiffania beamed shyly.

"Speaking of which, Romalia's intentions behind their actions are really suspicious."

"How so?"

"Aquelia's Saint...., as hero and symbol of the crusade, I'm not assigned to do anything at all, put aside completely."

"Hmm."

"Trapped at a choke point here, Romalia should be feeling very anxious...., why aren't there any orders issued to us at all?"

Although under watch 24/7, any direct contact from Julio or the Pope himself was unheard of, as if 'you have already finished your part', or should we say, saving them for the finale?

"....All we can do now is to expect her Highness's message." Louise said.

Henrietta told them she would 'definitely find a way to solve this, but to buy time for her before so', and then headed back to Tristain, all done with a face full of determination and believe.

Louise decided to trust in Henrietta, not the ignorant kind of trust when they were small and playing together, but one that's derived from Henrietta's attitude and the power in her words.

"Your cousin will most certainly bring a solution back.... we'll wait for her signs

while we're pretending to help Romalia, as long as we're here, her highness will have power to interfere with this war."

Tiffania nodded, mentally handing over difficult decisions and whatnot all to Louise and Henrietta, and convinced herself: 'If it's them, I can definitely entrust my life upon'

"Louise, you really are incredible, taking everything into consideration, while I'm just here worrying and fearing."

"It can't be helped. Sheltered away from the rest of the world in the woods of Albion, it is understandable for you to be unfamiliar with these events. On the other hand, that guy...." Louise said through her gritted teeth.

"Were you talking about Saito?"

"Mhm, what was he thinking, taking up on challenges alone!"

"Saito must have had Saito's own concerns, must have proper thoughts and reasonings of a man, before deciding to do so."

"Huh! That guy doesn't have much thinking to talk about! Just as I was starting to believe some sense was surfacing in him, they're all these weird dreams, something 'three of us together', if those backyard things count as 'a man's thoughts and reasoning', he would be better off dead."

"Aren't you going a bit overboard?" Tiffania scolded.

"You can say that only because you have no idea what kind of lewd fantasties that dog has to torture me."

"L-lewd fantasties?"

Louise lifted Tiffania's hat, and started whispering close to her pointy ears.

"......Court- In the middle of the courtyard!?"

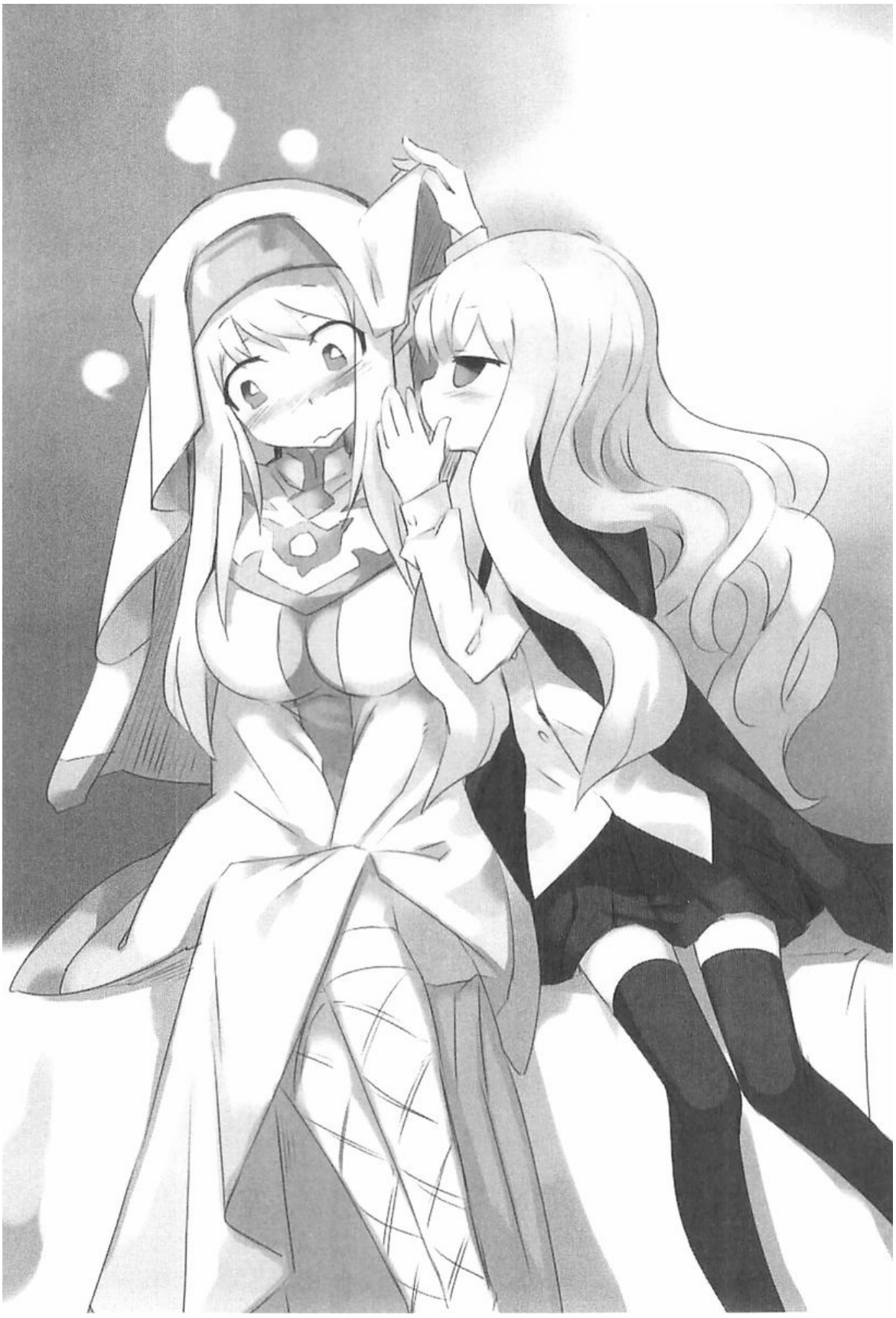
"....."

"Making Louise obediently on all fours like a dog!"

"....."

"Whip....., while that....., ...it came, ...my.....by myself?!.....and.....slowly....! Oh! Wah!"

Tiffania, under mixed emotions of confusion, shock and shyness, trembled continuously upon Louise's whispers.



"Isn't it, makes you speechless. That dog."

"Although I couldn't understand half of it, but it must be something very indecent!"

Tiffania gripped her knees with a flushed face.

"Softly....., th-that...., but more unbelievable, Saito.....that....then....."

"....."

Louise started to spew out more of Saito's even wilder fantasties, Tiffania almost losing balance and fainting. Louise continued to whisper with a low voice.

"....."

"Stop, Louise stop." Tiffania huffed holding her chest.

"I know, unforgivable, right!"

Louise gradually drooped her eyelids.

"Out of the blue, I'm not the only one being imagined like this, in the 'three of us' one, I found out this point."

"Say Louise, I'm very curious,..... if I had to go through this I would definitely die, if it were Louise it would be fine?"

"What do you mean?"

"Because, before discovering the 'three of us' one, Louise wasn't so angry....., ah, ah! Ah!"

Louise suddenly grabbed Tiffania's breasts and squeezed with force.

"It must be your breasts that made you say something impossible."

"Sorry! I thought too much, I thought too much! Louise was always angry!"

"Of course." Louise let go and looked away. Huffing and puffing Tiffania turned her head to Louise.

"Still, boys can be quite scary...."

"Don't talk about it as if it's not of your concern, you never know if you're also in that dog's dreams, dried out or whatever."

"M-me?"

"Yes, because you, have those ~~ kind of things. Although I don't know, your appearance will definitely be ranked top." Louise said while starting to play again with Tiffania's breasts, her tiny hand soon slithering through the loose nun's dress, squeezing all sorts of shape out.

"A-as for what did he do,... to this pair of breasts,...! M-m-m-must have stuck his head in it! C-can't see anything!"

"Ah, ah, waah, Louise, please! Please!"

Spending a lot of energy Tiffania finally escaped from Louise's grasp.

"Hua,hua....."

"....Sorry."

"My breasts did nothing wrong, please don't hurt them. ....."

"You've got a point there. Speaking of which, where did that guy slither to now? I hope he's not somewhere collecting samples for more awkward fantasties?!"

"If it's Saito, he should be drinking wine with the knights? They collected a lot of ransom in the day."

Louise frustratedly cursed: "Nothing good ever comes from giving idiots money!"

When Tiffania brought Louise to the bar, the already dead drunk teens were planning to massively buy more wine to pour down their throats.

"Hey hey!! Isn't that the arrival of, hic, Aquelia's Sainnnttttt and our holy nuunnnnn!"

Gimili cried out loudly, dragging both his body and a chair: "Here, here! Please

take a sit, may our holy founder Brimir's nun permit us glorious knights to pour you a cup of goooood wine."

Gimili said with a jokingly tone. The teens all congregated around Louise and Tiffania soon afterwards, crying out "Hurray" three times, completely drunk.

"Crusade hurray! Romalia Hurray! Aquelia's Saint Hurray!" Then looked at each other with "what the heck are we yelling at" written all over their face, then bursted out into laughter. Louise coldly surveyed the bunch of drunks, just to discover Saito's untimely disappearence.

"Where's Saito?"

"Oh, that guy's not here, said had something for Tabitha, long gone." Malicorne replied.

"Tabitha?"

Louise's shoulders shuddered.

That guy even, towards the small Tabitha....., extended his claws !?

A thought that never came much across Louise started to expand in her mind, a jealousy completely different from what she holds towards Siesta, Henrietta or even Tiffania started to envelope her.

Saito reacting to them, full of a woman's attractiveness, although enraging, but still relatively understandable.

But, Tabitha is different. Smaller than even herself, isn't breasts even more so? If Saito had normal tastes, Louise is no competition.

But on the other hand if Saito isn't interested in that....

Louise feels something from the blue haired girl which is enough to cover those inadequate points, an almost overwhelming attractiveness....

Louise heart skipped a beat. No matter which one is it, it's as if she is no competition, plus Tabitha is a desendent of Gallian Kings, defeating her in both bloodline and position.

Louise is starting to fear.

Could it be that she is....., the strongest enemy so far?

Louise knows that Tabitha holds a special feeling towards Saito, but that...., is not of love, but more of "devotion towards knight" that kind of thing, kind of similar to respect.

Even when peeking at the showers she helped Saito without any clothes on her body, kissed Saito, to prevent Louise from punishing him or something, all sorts of reasons.

At least not because of "indescribable acts that should not be mentioned", fits more.

Or is it?

Was it all from her love towards Saito?

As a woman, Louise's alertness immediately pushed the "Emergency button". Anyhow, the first thing she should do right now is to hurry and suppress the people at the scenes.

Tabitha was sitting on the staircase leading straight to Carcassonne's hermitage's main door, reading a book. As surroundings began to dim, dots of stars began to ignite everywhere on the streets, revealing tiny pedestrians or armed Romalian soldiers weaving their own way through the narrow corridors.

From this distance, the illumination is not enough for someone to read. A small light popped out from Tabitha's staff as well.

'Why am I reading in this kind of place?'

If she wants some light, there's more than sufficient in her room, there's no reason to read in a place with people traversing every now and then either, Tabitha began to analyses her own actions.

.....It's the desire to be found.

After all, she was holding an opened book at this eye-catching staircase,

ironically a perfect match with the tip of her staff - if it was meant for reading, this ball of light would be a little too bright...

The conversation she had just now with Julio has made her very uncomfortable. While it may be true, just as Julio pointed out, alliance with the powers of the Romalian army, achieving revenge will be so much more simpler, swifter.

Then again...., if so, the war would only evolve to be more fierce, her Gallian people pouring blood over each other in civil unrest.

'But, isn't it the same right now.' A calm undisturbed part of her mind told herself. As described, the southern vassals have all allied themselves to Romalia, the country divided cleanly into two factions. At this point, if she were to take the throne, wouldn't it cause the effect of making them surrender, merging once again with Gallia, making less unnecessary sacrifices?

What should she do now?

Tabitha eyed the book laid in front of her. Claimed to be reading, the only part of her body that seemed to fit that description were her eyes. None of the book's contents entered her mind at all. On the surface everything seemed calm, but in within, another battle is happening.

Because of just this, Tabitha wanted to see him. Whenever nervous, unsure, she wants to see his face, that knight she's devoted to serving, though this is absolutely not the feelings of love....

That's right.

That's why she's sitting at this appealing place, waiting...., because of her uncertainty, that's why she desires to see "her knight". This is not love, absolutely, not some love.....

"There you are."

Hearing that voice, Tabitha unconsciously threw her book on the ground. As she bowed to pick it up, her shoulders felt the touch of the teen's hand.

"........!"

Saito's face reduced the distance between their faces. Tabitha felt herself going red.

In her ears, Saito softly whispered: "I have something to give you."

".....What?"

"......It's, letter." As if not wanting to elaborate, Saito said.

Tabitha's heartbeat raced. Letter? Is this what they call a love letter?

She kept repeating to herself: 'This is not a love letter this is not a love letter, towards the knight I serve, I cannot have feelings of love.'

Or so she says, a warm sweet feeling spread throughout her body.

"It's not too convenient here, somewhere without anyone...."

Saito cautiously eyed both sides. An armored Romalian soldier was watching them with lazy eyes.

Tabitha whistled, summoning Slipheed. With light footsteps, Slipheed landed from the sky. The two leapt on Slipheed, just as they were about to fly, the watching soldier hurriedly paced towards them.

"May I ask where would you be heading, it's already this late!"

"It's only a stroll, or a so called date."

With Saito putting it that way, the soldier displayed troubled emotions.

"Please make it short, I'll be scolded."

Under the watchful eye of the soldier, Slypheed flew into the pitch black sky swiftly.

"...Um, to avoid suspicion, we should..." Saying so, Saito reached out his hands and hugged the shoulders of Tabitha who was sitting in front of him.

The redness on Tabitha's both cheecks spreaded like jam on bread.

Good thing it's night, she thought. Even with a blushed face, no one would discover it.

Tabitha's lack of words was interpreted as displeasure by Saito.

"....Sorry, for doing these things."

".....It's alright."

A birds eye view of the Carcassonne's streets, Saito couldn't help but give a sigh. Drops of faint lights crammed in the long and narrow streets extracted the memories of the city's night view from his mind.

"From the sky, you can't help but be awed, just like a highway at night."

"Highway?"

"Oh, it's something on my side of the world."

"Really want to take a look." Tabitha replied softly.

"Colbert's words exactly." Saito smiled, then returned to a stern face and extracted a letter from his pockets.

"...In the day, at the sandbanks the we and the Gallian army held a contest."

"I know."

That is already a slightly faded latter. Tabitha felt her heart racing once again,....but felt like cold water thrown over her when she heard what came next.

"The last adversary, handed this to me, and told me to give it to you. It's someone on your side I guess?"

Tabitha began to be serious, took over the letter and pulled out its contents - a small note. Illuminating her wand, she began to read.

"**Castlemont ()** ."

"As expected. Someone you know?"

Tabitha nodded.

"....Rings a bell somewhere, -that's it! The one who swiftly let us across the Gallian borders! So he's the guy...., I couldn't recognize at all with his face covered." Saito exclaimed.

Bart, Castlemont () , cooperated once on a mission together as the Captain of Knights of the Eastern Roses, a square wind mage, also a supporter of her passed away father...., sworn loyalty to Tabitha, what message was he trying to deliver?

Alongside with surprise from the unexpected sender, Tabitha continued to read down the letter. On it, was all sorts of of jaw-dropping news:

News of rebellion against the despicable Gallian's conspiracy, failing to capture King Joseph by raiding the Versailles Palace, followed by news of the disassembly of the Knights of the Eastern Roses, him and a few surviving knights disguised as mercenaries joining the Gallian army.....

At this point, Tabitha bit her lower lips tightly.

"May I take a look as well?"

Tabitha nodded.

After finishing the letter, Saito showed fierce expressions. "Things have become complicated.... What do you prepare to do?"

Shutting her eyes lightly, Tabitha replied: "I don't really know myself."

Saito fell into deep thoughts.

".....If, hypothetically, just as what's written down here, Tabitha officially declare her royal status and take the throne, what would happen? Will the war worsen?"

".....No idea, maybe, maybe not."

"If so, no matter which one it is, I can't concur, this would be too dangerous for Tabitha. If you stand directly in front of them, they'll madly charge towards your way."

"Certainly."

Saito continued with a serious tone: "Right now, her Highness...., Queen Henrietta is on her route home. To stop this 'Crusade', she must be plotting a plan right now. She tells us to also make our own, but all we did was this random challenge contest.... Therefore, Tabitha, can you temporarily drop this matter?"

"....Understood."

Then, the last sentence of the letter caught their attention.

'Joseph used a terrifying spell, teleporting into the courtyard in a split second, please beware.'

"Tabitha, heard of any spells like it before?"

Tabitha scanned her knowledgeable database, after a pause...., but nothing relevant came up.

"Then,... an unknown spell, ... could it possibly, void?"

"....The possibly for that isn't low."

Legends state that void magic is carried on in the King's bloodline.

Originally part of royalty herself, Tabitha faintly recall herself and her clan discussing relevant topics. Of course, nobody really thought that the revival of void was possible either back then.....

Yet now, the void revives,... playing a crucial part in shaking the entire Halkenia world.

Though Tabitha did not directly hear anyone other than Louise being a void user, her own perceiving eyes and logic confirms that Tiffania and the Pope are also void users.

Even if her uncle were a void user, it wouldn't be very surprising either.

After all, her uncle was jealous of her father because of just the fact that he was no good in any of the four fields.

"Let this topic end here, if we were to avoid the eyes and ears of Romalia....., really, other than the sky there's no place more safe to talk...."

Tabitha nodded in agreement.

Before all of this, revenge was her own personal business...., but now, all sorts of powers with knowledge of her real identity all have their own ideas, working in clandestine just to manipulate her. The revival of void, undoubtedly cascaded the chain reaction.

Herself, in this Gallia, has a high political value.

Tabitha, for the first time ever, felt a sense of ingenuity. Before this, as long as she and her familiar worked hard, there's always a way out.

But this time is very different. Her every decision, every actions, will seal the destiny of tens of thousands of Gallian soldiers, Gallian families.

....And that uncle, suddenly realizing her void powers.

What on earth should she do, she has no idea.

That's why Tabitha made a decision.

If it's Saito...., there should be nothing wrong. If it's the Saito who saved her quite a couple of times when she was in danger, certainly, it would be safe to hand over her life to him.

In the midst of this raging political seas of Halkenia, it's as if her existence were a tiny boat being toyed around.

However, if it's Saito...., even drifting through these waves she would still safely steer towards a calm harbor, Tabitha felt. ....No, maybe he would even calm the entire storm?

That's why she's determined to walk on the path he chose.

Her savior, her knight, her hero, her..... That's right, this is the best choice. As long as it's a path he chooses, no matter what the future looks like, they'll definitely make it.

Her will.... was filled with joy on the verge of tears. As long as it's with him, they'll definitely make it, no matter to the end of the oceans, end of the world.

Tabitha comforted her trembling heart again and again: 'This is not love.'

'That is impossible.'

'Completely over the line.'

So she says, but in within her heart is still having a mind of its own, bathing itself with happiness unauthorized, as if the troubles she's facing right now can all be easily solved.

Despite her efforts of denying "the feelings of love", her body still acted on its own.

Unconciously, Tabitha softly leaned towards Saito.

"Hmm, are you cold?"

No, of course not, the cold air from soaring the skies have long been dispersed miraculously by Slipheed's skills...., yet still, Tabitha nodded, and apologized lightly to her father for lying. Then again, it doesn't seem so bad to have made this lie.

"It that so....., night, high above in the sky."

Saito expanded his cape, allowing Tabitha to snuggle in, feeling Saito's warmth, ... suddenly Tabitha had an urge to cry.

For the first time, she suddenly realized, all the time these past weeks, how she was struggling.....

'I, can finally put myself at ease' Under tearful eyes, Tabitha muttered to herself.

'Being able to feel at rest....., this is still the first time.'

".....Then, it's almost time we should go back?" When Saito said so, Tabitha softly shook her head without much of a thought, naturally saying: "A little longer"

"Eh?"

".....Want to stay like this, fly a bit more."

That is, since she has arrived on this piece of land, the first time that has came out of her mouth - a completely unreserved request to someone else.

Around a hundred meters above Slipheed, a black owl was soaring the night skies, it's dark silhouette disguised among the pitch black night sky and clouds, making it more than difficult to discover, yet still in its maximum eavesdropping range, while keeping a safe distance from Slipheed.

Chapter 4: The Jewel of Fire

The Capital city of Gallia, Lutece.

As of now..... the betrayal of the southern vassals have triggered the current royalties and citizens to flee massively, similar to the disturbance at Albion not long ago.

Suddenly titled as an "enemy of God" by the Romalia Church, this furthermore escalates the confusion of Gallian citizens. For consecutive days, strict believers of Brimir have gathered themselves at the church of Lutece, praying for a miracle.

Distancing themselves from the Gallian King Joseph day by day, the priests and preachers, (seeing not a single trace of belief in the Gallian King himself), between the factions Gallian and Romalia, cautiously make sure that their words are not biased to either side, taking a completely neutral stand in this battle.

A week since Romalia's invasion, Lutece, once delicate to every inch, has already been submerged with a dark, "end of the world" scent.

The elite Knights of the Eastern Roses' defiance and their purge..... the frightening side of these news and their despise towards foreign armies are the only things keeping most of its original army still fighting for King Joseph..... but the morale is at an unprecedented low.

Gallia's defeat could be foreseen by any person. Everyone have developed a genuine feeling of repulsion towards a rule under Romalia, the country about to conquer these territories.

To prove themselves not "heretics", rich merchants all, acting on their own consciousness, transport carriage-full of gold and valuables to this church, the amount of "storage" representing the amount of devotion.

Consisting of plebeian class, the aristocracy and the court, Gallians attempted seek a small hope of survival for this crumbling country, and became more and more lively with the start of each day.

Yet, whenever these people are at the countryside of Lutece, at the place of Palace of Versailles..... Every glance at the ruins of the collapsed Grand Troyes courts, once containing beautiful clear sky blue walls, they can't help but feel the reality that all their work is for naught.

The original owner of the collapsed Grand Troyes courts, have already moved to a spot east of the main palace, the Concierge. As soon as Gallia has been declared as "enemy of God", the visiting ambassadors or councilors all fled to their own countries like rats fleeing a building on fire. Naturally, as of now there won't be any more guests coming forth, and eventually settled down at this place.

Sitting on the bed that had replaced the dining hall's long dining table, Joseph quietly gazed at an old chest on the floor. A smile that had no connections with the disturbance outside surfaced between his tidy mustache.

That chest awakened out warm memories in him.

Memories of childhood..... in the middle of the broad palace, a five-year-old Charles and the eight-year-old Joseph were playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Joseph hid in this place after turning the place upside-down with effort. This was a popular chest among the commoners. Although it may not seem to have enough size to fit in a person, the storage space was actually expanded up to 3 times its original size through magic. It was a one-of-its-kind magical tool.

Full of belief that he would not be found if he hid here, he made an exaggerated claim to his little brother. In the end....."pop", the lid to the chest was opened, with Charles poking his head inside.

"I've found you, brother."

"You've actually found this place, wow."

"Heheh, I used 'detection' magic, then this placed started shining. Turns out this thing is a magical item."

"You've already learned how to use 'detection'? Unbelievable."

Charles showed a pleased face.

Softly, Joseph mumbled. "If there were any chance, I'd like to see your regretting face even just once. If that were possible, then none of these ridiculous disturbances would have happened. Take a look; your favorite Grand Troyes court has already vanished. Your beloved Lutece is already situated as if it were in the fiery ovens of hell. Though said, these are all my work of art. I will not be swayed so easily. The betrayal of half a country does seem kind of sad, but this does not affect me at all. Actually, other than 'whatever,' I don't have any particular thoughts."

Then Joseph shook his head with a "Hmm..." "Anyways I'll first turn those guys to ashes. Half a country will be sent to your side soon. Just sit tight and wait, Charles."

Joseph sighed. "Feels like I've become very troublesome. Originally I thought I only had to take each street, each country, and destroy them one by one.... on second thought, this is actually a very tough task. It'd be better to turn them all to ashes. Of course, this Gallia would be included as well. So sit tight and build your own kingdom up there, Charles."

As he reached this point, the large doors were suddenly slammed open violently.

"Father"

Walking with wide steps, was his own daughter, princess Isabella. Long blue hair draped over her shoulders, a sign of royalty. Her face, which usually sported an ominous smile, had never been paler.

"What in the world happened? Hearing Romalia's announcement, I had to rush back immediately from my trip at Albion. And when I come back, the entire city is a mess! I also heard that half of the country has betrayed you."

"So what?" Joseph replied, annoyed.

"....'So what' you say? It's all because of you allying with the elves that things turned out like this. Now we've become Halkenia's public enemy, haven't we?"

"It is my freedom to ally myself with anyone I like. Perhaps those long ears, compared to us Brimir believers, have a more complicated way of thinking. Never mind, none of that matters."

Isabella was scared of her father's attitude, she discovered unexpectedly.

Until now, although she had once thought there was something weird about her father... today was her first day to actually experience the "other side" of her father.

Isabella, as far as her memories served, seldom talked with her father. After her mother passed away, the distance between them lengthened even more.

Before Isabella had a chance to find anything out of place, she had already grown up.

Their status of royalty, as King and princess, was valued much more than as family.

The growing Isabella was surrounded by tons of maids, butlers, playmates, so she never had much loneliness in her childhood.

Of course, once in a while, there was a desire to be with her family, but she would always comfort herself with the reason that "father is busy with his work."

So in the end, other than showing up for the public every now and then, they barely had any time to see each other.

His attitude, the title of "incompetent king", rumors of murdering her uncle Harold.... these things had slowly turned unimportant to Isabella. No matter what she desired, Joseph would always satisfy her needs.

But now..... different from his usual, varying, difficult to approach attitude, facing him directly made Isabella tremble.

Standing in front of her was a completely unfamiliar person.

Even so, Isabella drew out her courage and cried out "F-father, I do not

understand at all! Isn't the country about to collapse! What would happen to me!"

"Who knows. If you don't like it then leave this country."

Violently trembling, Isabella's teeth chattered loudly. "....what are you thinking right now, father?"

"Disappear from my sight. Looking at you feels like staring at myself, urg."

Unable to stand the frighteningly deep low voice's words, Isabella quickly dashed out of her father's bedroom.

In replacement, with completely black hair, Sheffield appeared.

"Myoznitnirn?"

"Bidashal has a message for you. Says that 'it' is almost complete."

Joseph smiled lightly, and stood up.

Joseph and Myoznitnirn walked slowly towards the church deeper into the palace Versailles.

Facing the master and familiar, who never brought anyone else with them, the knights guarding Versailles saluted and then bowed.

Both their hands were shaking, but not because of the fact that their lord could use magic to bury traitors, together with the entire Grand Troyes to his pleasure.

No, it was because... of the "research" going on brazenly in the middle of the palace and its crucial "researcher," for the purpose of suppressing the rebellion at the port of San Marin.

Since the start of said research, which would be soon be experimented on San Marin, a rumor began to spread among the knights and army.

"There are elves supporting Joseph."

At Romalia, announcing a crusade because of that reason was 'just an excuse' to most of Versailles's nobles and soldiers. Few others knew otherwise.....

The guards here realized that, contrary to popular belief, that was not an excuse.

Using the same pace as ever, Joseph, and his female officer dressed black like a crow from top to bottom strolled..... their destination was Versailles's church, which was also the lab for the elves' frightening research.

The differently dressed man who called himself Bidashal didn't even attempt to hide his long ears anymore. Those kind of conversations continued to spread out in the city in clandestine.

"Romalia is taking us as an 'enemy of God', you really can't do anything about it. More unbelievable is our country allying with heretics..... feels like we're in a nightmare." The knight sighed after watching Joseph leave. He, was exactly one of those who saw Castlemont of the Eastern Roses' betrayal. The relatively older knight next to him was also one of the first to be alerted after those events.

"Perhaps that night, I should have followed Castlemont and left."

"Why would you think like that?" The old knight asked his student with a soothing voice.

"If so, at least we won't be standing up against God and Founder. Compared to our founder, our lord seems to be much more interested in the elves than the church."

"It's still not too late. Like the southern vassals, just go and join the crusade."

"If you grant me permission....." The young knight looked towards the older one. Their conversation was like one between a father and child. Letting out a sigh, the old knight said "Without land or the title of a baron, people like me who live only on our salary... what can we do after we leave the kingdom?"

That is very true of most nobles of the Gallian army as well. With such giant events happening within their country's own borders, it was impossible to have no complaints at all. However, all of them relied on their country. Even if they were to join the crusade, there was no one in Romalia who could guarantee their status. Those of lower status may even be interrogated with torture for being a heretic.

Similarly a noble, but those with land and actual power, unlike military men like them, their standing are completely different.

Recalling the day he was knighted, the old aristocrat scrunched his eyes and said "Listen well. Swearing loyalty is nothing but just that. You won't have peace anyhow. We, in meaning, were a part of this kingdom since a long time ago."

"Yes." The young knight replied without any signs of grimace.

"Like always, just focus on guarding this place. In reality, our existence is nothing more than seaweed on the bottom of a ship. But... seaweed won't dry out. No matter if the ship is sailing smoothly, or is sinking right now, the seaweed will always be attached to this ship."

The old knight looked far away.

"Frandal, everything will be fine as long as you do your part quietly. That's how I survived from the battlefields."

While walking, Myoznitnirn gave Joseph a report of everything that happened the past week.

"About not finding Castlemont's dead body.... it seems like he's still alive. Most likely mixed in with the army placed by the river Lelion."

"Is that so."

"He may try and contact Charlotte. I believe we should take action as soon as possible....."

Joseph shook his head "There's no need."

"Why?"

"Because despair has the greatest effect when you're drowned in hope. Let those guys dreaming 'maybe bringing me down' die with their hopes. I really admire them for never being able to feel this amount of despair before." Those were the thoughts from the deepest parts of his mind.

"Will do." Afterwards, Myoznitnirn took half a step backwards, and bowed deeply. ".....I'm deeply sorry. After losing ten 'Jörmungandr'..... then not being able to control the riot at San Marin." Her voice sounded really apologetic.

"About this matter, I've already heard. Don't mention it anymore."

".....But, please give me your punishments."

"Honestly, even if I wanted to punish you, I can't think of any. I gave my orders, you failed. Afterwards, half the country rebelled. It's just that simple. How do both things relate."

"Don't you feel angry?"

"Angry? Me? If I had an emotion called anger, maybe I wouldn't be thinking about turn the entire world into ashes right now." Joseph said in a self-mocking tone.

"Then..... I hope you can listen to me privately. In reality, I am very anxious." As soon as Myoznitnirn finished, she blushed. Describing the reason for her anxiousness... voicing her inner thoughts in public felt unbearable.

"Anxious? You? Now that's something unusual."

"Yes.....that, because I saw it..... a metal war chariot with a fire power never heard of. Now I'm extremely confused. Like previous reports, a cannon excellent in every field possible brought down our Jörmungandr one after another. Putting also that miraculously flying ship into consideration, the enemy may have large amounts of weaponry comparable with elven technology. This point is undeniable."

"Those weapons, don't they originate from where you came from, the 'Orient'?"

"No" Myoznitnirn shook her head. "We people of the Orient, although we did develop our own technology to protect ourselves against the elves, merely created an imitation of elven technology."

"I hear it's relatively powerful."

"Relatively..... can't really say for sure. I am, after all, nothing more than a

priest's daughter."

"Oh, I remember something like that." Losing interest, Joseph turned back and looked forward again.

"Your highness, don't you love Miss Isabella?" Remembering Joseph's attitude previously, Sheffield asked her master.

"Isabella? How's could I. 'There is not a father in the world that doesn't love his daughter.' To me, this phrase is nothing but a praise for fathers. I don't see anything special between our relationship. After all, there are plenty of other parents in this world who don't love their children."

"Suppose I actually loved her...." Joseph wondered with a dull tone "Un, I would definitely take care of her first. But I don't think she's a human that worthy to begin with. Every time I see her face I find traces of myself, so disgust always comes out first."

"No matter what she does, just don't obstruct your work. Is that it?"

"I guess that's pretty much it."

Sheffield hanged her head at the ground sadly. Joseph, who was walking alongside with her, didn't even bother to take notice.

Flowers blossomed on both sides of the road. After multiple stone paved walkways, a church with a shining sacred object on top of its pointed tower came into their sights. In front of the church, not a single guard could be seen. It was due to the person conducting experiments inside not needing any to begin with. These people called elves, since ancient times they had long formed a contract with the spirits of the earth. The energy of the ground could be called the most powerful existence ever.

Joseph and Myoznitnirn just stepped into the church, yet already a bone chilling wind welcomed them. Even though it was the beginning of summer, and this wacky wind didn't seem like a product of the building structure itself either.

Joseph lightly sneezed.

"Have you already noticed?" Myoznitnirn asked.

"Unn, although it's not as apparent to me as to you. Looks like I really am a 'bearer of the void'. Feeling the true power of the enemy, my body is shaking at such a magnitude."

Deep inside the church, Myoznitnirn pulled open the veil behind the altar. What it was hiding was a flight of stairs leading downwards.

It used to lead to the storage room of the church, but not anymore. From the look of the faint smoke coming out, it was as if there was a fire going on below.

Every step down the flight of stairs, the amount of smoke became denser.

Around halfway down, one could already see a fierce burning fire deep down. Loud crackling sounds echoed throughout the tunnel, more painful to the ears with every step taken.

It came from a large bonfire fueling on oversized logs.

Its sides, of length around 3 mails, formed a huge square-shaped pile of wood.

There were a total of four piles like this.

One placed at each corner of the room, each one of them spouting black smoke. From a crudely made hole in the wall, large amounts of air continuously poured in, making sounds like a trumpet.

More incredible was that despite the enormous amount of fire generated, there was not an inch in the basement that could be called hot. On the contrary, it was as if one was in mid-winter.

"Although I have heard most of it before, it is still one heck of a sight."

"By absorbing the heat around it, formed by condensing. The thing called the jewel of fire....."

The inexplicable reason for the contradicting sights and temperature had been revealed. A faint smile floated on Myoznitnirn's face.

In the exact center of the room, there was a small sized altar. In front of the altar, with long, almost transparent, golden hair, the elf had his hands raised high,

completely focused of chanting spells.

It was the figure of Bidashal.

"*O'Flames. O'Flames by thee contract, heed my words and reside here*"

Chanting, the so called 'elemental' magic, in Bidashal's hands, laid a fist sized red gem.

Red, or more accurately, a brilliant glow came from the flame-like interiors of the transparent gem.

Realizing Joseph walking close, Bidashal raised his head.

"I heard it's already done."

"I merely nodded my head when that woman asked 'Is it ready to a degree that can be used?'. There's no definite concept to define the completion of 'the jewel of fire'. It's a gem that condenses the power of fire. Regardless of size, the gem is just that. Finished or not, that will depend on your judgements."

After hearing his words, Joseph laughed loudly.

"Elves really are a different kind! These sort of things, just make your own sensible judgements."

"My kin abhors ambiguity." Bidashal winced his eyes, staring straight down at Joseph. A natural jewel of fire is made from the natural energy underground. A level so deep that it would be impossible for humans to reach. To the elves, even if they were to dig such a hole, its gain would not be nearly enough to cover its losses.

To control the powers of the fire requires immense skill, definitely out of a human's capability, explaining how only a tiny population in Halkeginia know of its existence. Unfortunately, right beside Joseph..... the mysterious lady called Myoznitnirn was part of that tiny population, and had raised Joseph's interest in it.

"And how do you plan to use it?"

"Jewel of wind is a gem containing the powers of wind..... Jewel of fire is a gem containing the powers of fire, no?"

Even in the elven populations, only a few highly regarded powerful users had the ability to produce one. Bidashal was one of those few.

"Simply said, yes. I do not believe you nobles can correctly understand the concept anyway."

"Concept or whatever, the result is everything. Then, this small little stone... how many acres of land can it turn into ashes?"

Bidashal frowned hard. From Joseph's words he had a fair concept of Joseph's intention. For the elves, the jewel of fire was only a tool for warming the streets in the winter, or illuminating the streets at night..... using it for destruction, they'd never dared think about it.

"According to me..... if you release all the stored energy instantaneously..... in terms of your units, a 10 square miles, no, if it's this size, everything within 20 square miles will not be spared. But, how do you plan to release it? Against something powerful enough to seal this amount of energy, it's impossible to just unlock it."

"Using your 'void', you should be able to do it, no? Myoznitnirn?"

Myoznitnirn smiled even more. "Affirmative."

Hearing this, Bidashal's face lost color. "Using void magic? You? How, possible.... you?"

"What, you never knew?"

"How could, no, is it true? You are the bearer of this evil power? How could it....." Bidashal shook his head in disbelief.

"Who else you did you think would be more worthy of being Gallia's King?"

"At least I never thought it would be you. This is such a coincidence."

"Why would you say that? I never intended to hide anything from you."

"I completely don't understand what you're thinking. Are humans creatures at all? And yet you stand in front of me like nothing! To you guys, isn't this the final blow? What you're doing right now, isn't it, what you call, 'revealing your final card' to your enemies?" Feeling disgust for the first time in his life, Bidashal gave Joseph a look of hatred.

"Is that so. So, what do you plan to do after you know? Kill me? You can bury the man capable of 'reviving the void', your worst nightmares, in your own

hands. Or, do you continue to insist what you said 'I don't like wars' that kind of thing?" Joseph said, as if gleeful from the bottom of his heart. Bidashal gave expressions of regret.

".....It will only cause a new demon to revive."

"Oh, interesting. Do you mean there will be something else to replace me after I die?"

"....It's about time for that to happen. If it's you, you can stop it."

"Great. Like those Romalia idiots, in addition now we have an even more horrible nightmare. Therefore you must protect me with all your power, follow my words." Joseph patted Bidashal's shoulders sarcastically.

"Maybe I will turn out to be the person who understands elves most."

"This is not something to 'understand'." Bidashal said, trying to control his raged voice.

"Different point of views. Let me answer your question just now. But, seeing how smart you are, I'm sure you already know how I'm going to use this gem."

Bidashal understood everything in an instant. "Are you serious!?!? You. There will not be a single strand of grass, a single bug left. This is not even a metaphor! Can you do that kind of thing to your own kind?"

"If it's me, of course."

"Demon!"

"I wonder who of us is the real demon? The person who made this terrible terrible crystal, who was that person? And from where again? No matter how much you point at me, you know that I won't change my mind. Come back to your senses. You don't care how many I kill anyway, my dear elf."

Bidashal's eyes showed signs of fury. To an elf that seldomly shows any emotions at all, this was a very rare occasion. "I shouldn't have come here after all."

"No, you shouldn't have. That way you would've never noticed the demon inside yourself. But relax, bows and bullets have done no wrong. To do good or evil is up to the free will of the user. Just look at things simply like that."

Joseph left Bidashal's side.

"Make 2 or 3 more of things like that. Relax. You are not going to be the person who gets to use it.

I am."

Chapter 5: Honeymoon

On top of Louise's desk was an opened diary. Looking at this diary, Louise couldn't help but sigh.

The diary was written by Louise herself. Although the events that happened during her memory loss about Saito, the sequence of events had already been imprinted in her mind. Filling it back again wouldn't be a difficult task.

The contents detailed all the hardships Louise and Saito went through together, from the war of Albion all the way to Louise getting hurt by *Bowood* to protect Saito.

At the same time, the diary included enjoying being teased by Saito, etc. Even though the pages filled with these were as few as the number of clouds on a clear day, they were still an irreplaceable part of this diary.

Even though I care about Saito so much..... Louise thought, gritting her teeth. *Yet that guy always sticks with that maid.*

"How do you expect me to forgive you!"

Louise raised the diary, then slammed it hard on the desk. Putting her chin on top of the diary, swaying her crossed legs lightly, she closed her eyes.

While feeling the book's hardcover pressing against her face, Louise pondered *.....If say, Saito secretly read this diary, what would I think?*

It would feel very uncomfortable.....

This is different from the memories flowed in from Saito, isn't it? But then again, he's not reading it intentionally, just taking a glimpse accidentally.

Still, this is.....

Louise's eyes landed on the mirror hanging on the wall. In it was the face of a gloomy girl. *Is it because he always sees me like this, Saito tends to get close with other girls?*

Louise forcefully squeezed a smile. Maybe a bit too forceful, because after a while, it gave her cramps.

And so, she continued to use the diary as a pillow..... self-consciously staring outside the window.

By this time, the sky was starting to turn to a faint white.

In the morning, Saito came home with a very distressed look.

Turns out Louise didn't get any sleep from being depressed after having no avail searching for Saito for a day. By the time Saito entered the room, she had dark circles around her eyes.

Before Louise had the chance to stand up from her chair and question Saito where he went last night and what he did, Saito had already slipped passed her expressionless, and snuggled into bed.

"Wait a second" Louise tugged her own sleeves with force. Seeing Louise's look, Saito's guilty conscience kicked in and he avoided looking her in the eye, fuelling more of Louise's suspicion. "And?"

"And?"

"Yesterday, who were you with?"

Saito answered with difficulty. "Ta-Tabitha"

Louise took a deep breath, then raised her hand high.

As suspected!

And they were together for the whole time!

Just the point that Louise spent the last night troubled, she had more than enough

reasons to condemn Saito. *Should I just slap him here....* Louise thought.

The words Kirche said a few days ago came to mind, *Stand in the shoes of others, if you aren't able to see the problems in their point of view, you may unknowingly make them angry.*

Just like how she needed time alone every now and then, the same went for Saito. *Besides, given the current situation, if you had to meet up with someone in secrecy, it'd take time. Plus, being with Tabitha doesn't necessary mean he's having an affair. Perhaps he had something important to discuss.*

I better confirm it first. It's not too late to get angry afterwards...."

Trembling all over, Louise slowly put down her hand. "What were you doing with Tabitha"

Saito himself was also distressed. Should he honestly tell Louise everything he discussed with Tabitha last night? Tell her that in the Gallian camps there are people who wish for Tabitha to be Queen and guide them? But if he told Louise directly, the news would spread as quickly as fleeing ants. It was good to keep things quiet right now.

Moreover..... there's this annoying bunch of people from Romalia. Walls have ears. After considering all the dangers Saito decided to play dumb.

"That.... how should I say, we discussed problems related with her future."

Louise pouted and stared at Saito. Looking at those poor dark circles around her eyes, Saito hanged his head apologetically. After enduring the stares from Louise for a moment....

"I get it." And laid down. Saito was stunned. He was expecting her to scream 'What were you doing!!!' and deliver a kick between his legs, flipping the entire hotel upside down. To his surprise Louise actually believed his words.....

"W-what?"

"Uhh, you're pretty amazing..... I expected that I wouldn't be spared without being beaten all up after this."

"Huh? Do you want me to do that?"

"No! Absolutely not! Not a chance!"

".....Between you two, what did you talk about."

Saito bit his lips, displaying a serious face. Seeing Saito's expression, it actually confirmed Louise that the things she was worried about did not happen at all. If otherwise, there would be no way Saito could have made an expression like this.

"Is it something you can't tell me?"

"Sorry......."

"Oh, then never mind."

Just like how she didn't want her diary to be read, but since what's done is done..... Louise thought she might as well believe Saito.

"Then I'm going to sleep. I'm exhausted!"

As if feeling very relieved, Louise laid down on the bed after finishing her sentence. Saito was still wondering if she was still suspicious, and therefore put his hand on Louise's shoulders while taking a peek at her expressions.

"I'm really sorry. But when the time comes, I'll definitely tell you. I promise. I'm not hiding it from you on purpose."

Louise's cheeks almost instantly turned red. The feeling of being valued made Louise excited enough to blush.

However, since she didn't want her happiness to be seen by Saito, Louise shut her eyes tight and crossed her arms as if angry, but at the same time flirting, she said

"Shouldn't you have more secrets? Come on, spit it out honestly. You actually did something with her that would have made me really angry."

Before Saito had a chance to deny, Louise's thoughts came out already.

To Saito, Louise looked just like a pretty goddess, putting him at a loss of words.

"I-isn't it more like I've never done these things?"

"You liar. You must have absolutely done the same things to her as what you did to me in your fantasies." Trying not to display her pleasure in peacefully enjoying this, Louise blamed him directly.

"I, didn't I already tell you I don't want to?"

"I don't believe you. You're too despicable. You're only a dog with wild fantasies. Just because you look like a person, you think you're a handsome knight? What a joke!"

Inside Saito's head, there is this vague, inexplicable sense of excitement. His body began to be enveloped by passion of an unknown source.

"You insensitive idiot!"

Saito held down Louise's lower chin, attempting to forcefully plant his lips on hers. Louise somehow managed to evade with agile and counter with a bite on Saito's shoulders.

"Ow!"

Louise let go with a "fwah", just to begin her scolds again.

"What's with you? Don't tell me, you done the same thing to many girls in your dreams? Now you're trying to do the same thing to me?"

However there was not a sense of harshness, as if mumbling to herself and whining weakly.

As if trying to hide her embarrassment.

"Hmmph, if you were to do it with other girls you would be overjoyed wouldn't you. If it wasn't me everything would be fine. To you, you don't care who it is. Hmn...." Once the two's lips connected, Louise became honest with Saito.

"Idiot, you are so adorable, I would never..." As their lips parted, Saito said. With this, Louise's face turned fiery red

"I'm not adorable...." Other than this sentence, she could not think of anything else to say.

Saito's mind became blank. In front of this adorable Louise, lots of different things popped into Saito's head. Although these are difficult times, but what comes next..... after everything has settled down, like Guiche said, "buy clothes and jewelry and whatnot"....

"Um, Louise, I, I saved a lot of money"

"I, I know. Are you dumb? Her Highness already told you to take care...."

"Um, after this war ends.... don't we have a lot of things to do?"

"Eh?" Surprised, Louise raised her head.

"Guiche mentioned something about purchasing a castle.... needs around 10,000 écus. But if it was split with everyone, it should be enough to buy a mansion, those around 2,000 to 3,000 ones by the forests."

"What is this! Don't tell me, you plan to live here permanently?"

"No....sigh, how should I put it. If there was really a method to return, I will still go back after saying goodbyes properly. But, somehow, feels like this world is just like my other home." Saito said, holding Louise, surrounded by her fragrance.

"....really?"

"Heh, if that weren't true, I would have passed that gate a long time ago" Saito insisted with force in his voice.

"Then.... if we were to buy a house, that..." Saito words cut short from embarrassment.

"Wh-what..."

Marria... just as the word was about to come out, Saito stopped. It was still too early to talk about these things. "Live, live together. Even though we are living together already... at the dormitory, wouldn't it be better if we had more space.

We should start considering things afterwards."

At this moment, Louise was about to be drowned from being filled with joy. When she heard Saito suggest living together in the future, she felt as if she was flying in the clouds. The thought of this bright future, none of the hardness endured mattered anymore.

"....fur."

"Fur?"

"It would be great if the furniture were the beautiful ones"

"I understand. Nm. Then let's use just those."

"The furniture shop in Tristain has good taste." Subsequently, Louise began to plan every minor detail, such as how white walls would be better, how there should be a pond in the gardens, how many horses should be raised and so on.

"Wait, as for maids, we won't need any."

"....Speaking of which, will your father and mother agree with the two of us being together?" Saito asked worriedly.

"That's alright. After all I'm not a child anymore. Once I've decided, they won't say anything. More importantly..."

"Hmm?"

"It wouldn't matter if it weren't a mansion. Even if it were a small clean cottage I wouldn't mind"

"Why is that?"

"B-because...., if so we will be able to stay closer to each other." The Louise saying this shyly could not be more adorable.

"Louise....., you, you are so cute..... See, if you try even you can do it."

"What are you saying, I'm not cute at all."

"Very, very cute. Exactly like Lemon-chan."

"Am-am not. Besides, what is Lemon-chan?"

"Such smooth skin, just like Lemon-chan." Saito was completely obsessed, muttering this while kissing Louise's neck. All the grey matter in his brain turned completely into cotton. Saito had no idea what he was saying anymore.

"Stop it.... I don't like Saito doing these kinds of things..... Wait, ah, don't...."

"Waah, isn't this more Lemon-chan than Lemon-chan. Th-this is perfectly Lemon-chan."

"Awww....although I, I don't really understand, is it really like Lemon-chan?"

"It is. Anyway, try saying 'Lemon-chan is embarrassed'." This was a line that popped up randomly from a Saito hyped up to a degree too large to measure in light years, but Louise was already too far gone. Whatever came into her ears automatically turned into romantic lines. Or rather, at this stage, Louise didn't care about what was going to happen anymore. In some sense, she herself was even more passionate already than Saito.

"Le-Lemon-chan is embarrassed."

Finally. Along with her reddened cheeks, dreamy eyes, half closed lips, Louise said it, pushing Saito to the very edge.

"Moe! Lemon-chan is incredibly cute! Very adorable! Hurry! Take it all off! These clothes are really in the way, covering up all your attractiveness." Just as Saito blurted out lines even a dirty director wouldn't say while putting his fingers onto Louise's bedclothes..... from the other side of the wall came knockings from a neighbor.

"Ah!" Louise and Saito froze hugging each other. The knocks on the wall came again. Louise and Saito stared into each other.

"Wh-what is it?" Feeling weak all over, Malicorne's voice could be heard from the other side of the wall.

"This is news brought to you by the wisps of the wind."

The two realized that Malicorne seemed to be staying next door. Actually, all Tristain students were living in the same dormitory.

"Oh, yes....?"

"The walls are thin in this dormitory you know. Even Mr. Wisp himself was shocked. Nevertheless, whether it's your crusade, or the walls being too thin, or the pride of a noble, or shame, none of these matter to me. You should be considerate of your neighbors. Otherwise, I would have no choice but to blow you all up with wind magic."

The couple looked at each other and buried their head in embarrassment.

"Moreover."

"Yes?"

"It's nothing like Lemon-chan."

Louise's face turns purple in an instant and started yelling "It's not my fault! It's Saito, Saito told me to say it!"

"Lemon-chan is embarrassed."

"Stop it!"

After Saito have rapidly calmed down did he realize that what he said seemed a bit inappropriate. Like what Malicorne said, all the Lemon-chan never existed to begin with.

"Lemon-chan is embarrassed." Malicorne continued to imitate sarcastically. With that kind of tone, Louise began to become furious.

"I said stop it!"

"Lemon-chan is so embarrassed."

"I said stop iiiittttt!" Louise bellowed while gripping tightly on her wand, starting to chant spells.

"Explosion" sent the wall and Malicorne, who was directly behind it, flying.

Saito gaped at the gigantic hole and sighed.

Malicorne stood up from the debris, blood still dripping from his forehead, yet still he cheered happily. "Ha! Now we're roommates! No more weird stuff for you!"

Saito lightly bumped Louise's forehead and said "What were you thinking! You destroyed the entire wall! Now we won't even have time to ourselves."

"Shut up! It was you who told me to say iiiiitttttttt!"

Sent flying by Louise's second explosion spell, Saito smashed onto the wall on the other side, which gave way to allow Saito enter the next room.

Sleeping in the bed in what used to be that room, Tiffania stared wide-eyed at the Saito flying into her room.

"Wha, what? What happened!?"

Tiffania's bedclothes were merely a thin cloth wrapped around her body. When sleeping, she always wore more spacious and comfortable, traditional elven clothes. It was only because she had to travel with the Romalian army did she store it away.

Just like how Saito saw Siesta in his dreams, dressed revealingly by wrapping herself in a long cloth, this made Saito turn red. *This is completely against the rules, using only a thin cloth to shield such big breasts.*

"Me-melon-chan...." Saito uncontrollably reached out his hand.

Tiffania shrunk away from him by twirling out of his reach.

"Why am I Lemon-chan while Tiffania is Melon-channnnnnn!" Mixed emotions of shame and anger, Louise pounced on Saito and stomped all over his back. Still uncertain of the events going on around her, Tiffania buried her head in fear.

While despising the gasping Saito, Louise sat down softly and looked at the newly formed 4-people bedroom, then sighed.

Because of Louise throwing tantrums all over the bed, Saito was ultimately forced to sleep in the corridors. Still better than being bitten everytime he tried to get in. Yawning tiredly, Saito decided to come down to the bar for an early breakfast.

Everyone was there eating. The just-awoken Tiffania already changed into a new set of clothes and was taking tiny bites of some bread. Probably due to Malicorne's announcement, seeing Saito come in, the Ondine Water Spirit knights began to giggle with suspicious intentions.

"Morning, Lemon-chan."

Saito sat down exhausted, supporting his head with his arm.

"Lemon-chan, are you planning to strike today as well?" Guiche nudged Saito softly with his elbow.

"We're only 3,000 écus short from a castle! A castle, Lemon-chan!" Reinard whooped with glee.

"Stop calling me Lemon-chan!" Saito complained with an annoyed face.

Because after hearing Tabitha's message, their mood to fight wasn't really there. Although there were some stupid duels across a river right now, under the peaceful environment all sorts of conspiracies were brewing.

Just like what they experienced at Albion, before a bloody war began, they would first try to defeat King Joseph himself.... as for how exactly they would do it, a plan was still yet to be made.

Anyhow, the end to the war didn't seem like it was going to come anytime soon. Most probably Romalia would push forward with the idea of Crusade.

In the middle of conflicts of countries, the power of Gandálfr was nothing more than how a stone is used to construct a castle. Barely worthy of notice.

The only person reliable right now was Henrietta, who was making her trip back to her country. There was no contact from her so far, so no one had any idea how she was doing.

How exactly should this time be spent..... Saito pondered while drinking juice lazily.....

"Hey, Saito" An energetic voice called out.

Turning around, Julio appeared in front of them. Since arriving at Carcassonne, he had disappeared without a trace, conducting his own suspicious business....

The memory of almost meeting death because of Julio immediately resurfaced, giving Saito a spur of anger. The sudden desire to beat him up fought desperately to control his mind, but was eventually kept under control.

It'd be a bad idea to touch this guy, he's even more deadly than the Gallian king. Plus, with Henrietta not around, it would be best not to make any more trouble.

The Water Spirit Ondine Knights noticed the murderous tension between Saito and Julio and stopped talking.

They may have sensed that something happened between Saito and Julio, but Saito wouldn't bother to tell them anyway, so they had pretty much no idea what was going on.

....Determining from Saito's murderous eyes, obviously something ended very badly between the two of them. Moreover, they didn't like Julio much to begin with, so they all stood up looking very solemn.

"What brings you here today, Priest?"

Julio waved his hand and shook his head "It's nothing as serious as you think. It must have been hard work, everyone. I also heard news on how everyone has been active at the sandbanks, delivering a huge blow to their morale. Therefore, the Pope his highness entrusted me to specially hand this to you."

Julio drew out a small pouch from a parcel he was carrying with him and laid it on the table. Golden coins from the era of the last Romalian pope made clinking sounds from colliding against each other. "Please accept this, it is a blessing from God."

The knights' eyes were dazzled by the bright golden shine of the coins, but they quickly resumed a solemn expression. "We don't need some charity. We can

make money from our own salary."

Hearing Reinard say so, Julio's mouth turned into a smirk "Please don't refuse it. More money can never be a burden."

Julio then swiftly turned to Saito ".....now, I have something to talk to you about."

"What."

"Saying it here would be kind of..... could we talk about it outside?"

Saito's eyes surveyed the room while standing up. The Ondine Knights simultaneously stood forward, blocking the path between Julio and Saito.

"I'm sorry, I'll have to borrow your co-captain for a while....."

"We are the Ondine Knights, you know?" Guiche started, but Saito stopped him. "It's alright."

Saito was surprised when, after heading outside, Julio bowed towards him. "I don't really know how to put it.... but I'm really sorry for what happened before."

Not really catching up to the situation, Saito scratched his head sheepishly.

What the heck?

This guy... would he ever apologize and bow towards someone? Saito kept a close eye on Julio. When Julio finally lifted his head, the usual smile that looked down on other people was gone, his eyes sparkling.

The tension surrounding them softened to a point where it seemed it would be easily shattered by a single touch, giving anyone a feel of how his usual attitude was all an act, whereas this is the real Julio.

".....You tried to kill me. You really think we'd be fine after a simple apology?"

"Just like how you would do anything to protect the people important to you, when it comes to reclaiming the Holy lands, we are the same as you."

"The Holy lands is just another piece of land, don't put the two things together."

"It's not just any piece of land, it holds the future of all the people of Halkeginia." Julio's voice sounded ridiculously genuine.

"People? Isn't it just for religion?"

"You have completely misunderstood our religion. To all believers, the idea of anything for God eventually ends up the same as being for us."

As if overwhelmed by a mysterious charm, Saito felt it hard to breathe. The environment was relaxed to a degree far surpassing one when someone has successfully convinced another person to solve some problems.

"Well, I know you people are serious about it, but like I said, I won't do anything for the cause of a 'Crusade'. I have my own beliefs in my own Gods." Originally planning to fake an act, things took an unexpected turn and Saito ended up blurting out everything.

"If you dare do anything to Louise or me again...." Saito glared at Julio with the most condemning face he could come up with.

"If so, you can stab all you want into my chest. Oh, but I will resist, just so you know."

"You...."

"As long as you are in this world, we will never do anything to you. Right now you are Romalia's most important shield."

"Let me be honest. I will only help you until the defeat of Gallia. We'll have nothing to do with each other afterwards."

Julio smiled.

"Will do."

"You're giving up too easily."

"I have confidence in swaying you guys as long as I can talk to you."

Cunning bastard, Saito thought. Originally trying to kill Saito with a gun pointed

at him, yet now he's saying these surprising things...

"So, we're good?" Julio reached out his hand. Saito considered for a moment, then snorted. "Looks like is still too early to shake hands"

Julio was about to say something.... when something brushed across Saito's face.

"Ow!"

Speeding before their eyes was an owl. It swiftly landed on Julio's shoulders, shaking its feathers.

"Oh, if it isn't Nero? Welcome back."

"What's that?"

"It's an owl I raised. Oh, that's bad; you're bleeding." Julio reached for a handkerchief in his pocket and dabbed it on Saito's face. Looks like the owl's talons scratched Saito's face.

"No thanks, it'll stop on its own."

"Oh?" Julio commented, storing the handkerchief away.

"How long are you planning to continue this stand off with Gallia?" Saito asked. Julio laid out both his hands and shrugged. "Who knows. From what I see, the wind is about to blow again though."

Embarrassed to the degree of fainting, Louise ended up never leaving her bed. While lying on the bed, she imagined all sorts of things. The more she imagined, the happier she became..... Lemon-chan slowly turned into nothing, the words Saito said today of "living togther" chimed again in her head, and all was soon forgiven.

Louise wrapped herself in the quilt and rolled around for a while, then suddenly jumped off the bed and began writing in her diary.

It was an interior design of the house for both of them.

"This will be the bedroom, this is the guest room. But this is the dining room, we might hold balls occasionally, so we need a hall. This should be the kitchen, housing around 10 chefs. Anything less than that would be pointless."

The feather pen scratched across the paper, Louise drawing a floor plan of the mansion. Whichever way you look at it, it seemed more like a mighty castle than a comfortable home.

Louise contemplated the castle a while, then started to seriously consider how to turn their "lovenest" into something similar.

"Oh, one thing, we don't need maids."

Squinting her eyes, as soon as the note "No maids" was jotted down, Saito came back. Louise hurriedly shut her diary, yet Saito paid no attention nor attempted to greet her and sat down in deep thought.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"Oh, erm, I just had a talk with Julio"

"....about?" Louise's face became serious as well. With whispers, Saito reported everything discussed in their conversation to Louise.

"In short, Romalia seems to sense danger in the current situation. Somethings feels fishy."

Louise placed her hands on her hips and also sank into deep thought.

Despite their efforts in thought, they still had no idea what exactly Romalia was planning. Mixed with a sigh, Saito said "Really, what's with the Holy lands?"

"It's the lands where founder Brimir came to the world."

"Is something there?"

"Dunno.... all we know is that its location is somewhere around the centre of the desert..... througout the long history of Halkenia, we've never successfully seized

it back from the hands of the elves, so we have no idea what exactly lies there. Perhaps a castle our Founder lived in or something."

"Can't believe that kind of unfamiliar land would be the Holy lands. Why is it so important?"

"Can't help it. We were only taught that it is the most important thing in the world."

Saito sprawled on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Unconsiously, the visions from his "dream" came to mind again.

"Was it real?"

"Hmm? You mean that an elf was the first Gandálfr?.... who knows, perhaps it's just your fantasties? You know how adept you are at that."

"That's right, I should ask Derflinger."

Saito drew Derflinger out of its sheath. He planned to ask him from the start, but the matter was soon forgotten due to other matters.

"Hey, legendary sword."

"Hey partner. Even if you were to complain about how lonely you are, no one would listen."

"Say, I had a dream of being together with founder Brimir."

"Oh, I remember you said something like that."

"Were those things real? Or was it some sort of hallucinations due to being stressed out?"

"It's real."

Hearing this, Saito and Louise couldn't help but widen their eyes.

"The runes store memories which made you have that dream, just like appearing in a show."

"Then founder Brimir's familiar truly was an elf? Wouldn't it become a great historical discovery?! Why did you never tell us about it?" Louise cried out in surprise.

"Well, you never asked. Besides, I myself forgot. Now that you speak of it, I'm starting to remember, oh right, that's what happened...."

"Then tell us everything you remember!"

"Impossible... my memories are all in fragments, such as what breakfast they ate and all kinds of boring pointless stuff. On the other hand, key points, not so much. Randomly telling you that Brimir didn't like onions would be stupid."

"Brimir said his name was ...."

"Probably a name he used when younger. He did go through a lot, you know."

"Saito, was there anything valuable in that dream?" Louise stretched her neck like a giraffe.

"Hmmm...., elven women are terrifying."

".....ohhh, so Tiffania really is just an exception....."

"No, I don't mean like that. When she's angry, she calls founder Brimir a barbarian, going so far as using violence, just like Louise...."

"What do you mean? You really remember pointless stuff, don't you..." Louise's curiosity quickly turned into displeasure.

"Aww, those were nice times. Sasha, a noble elf with long ears in the middle of the desert...."

"Right right, that's the name, but I don't recall seeing you."

"I was still yet to be born when Brimir was still using that name, but Sasha and I were great partners, going all over the world..., she was an honest and direct kid, though sometimes too focused on winning. She had quite a bit of pride in her, but at the same time cried a lot...." Derflinger seemed to be mesmerized in the past long forgotten...

"What kind of adventures did you have?" Louise came close to Derflinger with deep interest. Undoubtedly everyone would be interested when it came to things about Brimir.

"Like I said, I don't remember actual details." Derflinger suddenly talked with a lonely tone. "But then, just...., something sad undeniably happened." And stayed silent afterwards.

"Don't harass Derflinger." Saito lightly scolded Louise. The latter displayed a shocked expression. "What's with you! Brimir summoning an elven familiar means that the relationship between Brimir and elves were great, we have no reason to be hostile against elves!"

"Oh."

"Really, you're so slow!" Louise raised her finger in glee.

"But then again, founder Brimir did say something about seizing land back from the hands of the heretic elves or something similar, right?"

"Or so it's said, but if we understood what exactly caused the demise of the relationship between founder Brimir and elves, then we would have no reason to open war against them, would we?"

"Something so distant, how are we supposed to...."

"We have this talking sword; we have the dreams you had. It won't be impossible if you try." Louise said, determined. It may seem easy with words, but this was just as hard as solving the true meaning of ancient mythologies; it was not something that could be done in an instant.

Still, Saito felt how touching a determined Louise could be. *The justice she follows is not used to lecture others, but to help her make decisions.* Filled with admiration, Saito nodded towards Louise "That's right... let's work hard to do this."

"This is an amazing card we drew by chance. If we use it carefully, we may even manage to crush the entire Crusade!"

Saito hurriedly covered Louise's mouth. "Idiot, you're too loud."

"R-right."

An eavesdropping Romalian spy could be just next door.

"....anyways, as soon as the Queen her highness comes back we'll tell her. This will definitely make her happy."

Chapter 6: Tabitha's Long Night

On this night, Tabitha had a hard time falling asleep, most of the time spent lying on the bed and staring at the patterns on the ceiling, self-consciously reminiscing how her younger self used to stare at the ceiling as well when not being able to fall asleep.

The Palace of Orléans of which she used to live in had ceilings decorated with pretty shapes related to religion, her bedroom one of the scene "Arrival of the Founder".

The Founder came down to the Holy lands under the blessing of angels. His face was deeply veiled by his hood, so his exact looks could not be seen. Angels circling around him held his hands, faces full of heartwarming smiles.

The younger Tabitha was terrified of the hooded Founder. She would even imagine how pale would she turn if one night bright shining eyes appeared under the hoods.

After all these years, a sense of fear would still surge from staring at the ceilings, not because of the religions drawings on them, but of herself, fearing the true intentions of her hooded self.

If others noticed this, how would she handle it?

These things cannot be discussed with Kirche, or even Slipheed in human form. If they knew, they would probably say "I'm always on your side" or that sort of thing.

That would "speed up the process" even more.

Suppressing her true feelings from bursting was no easy task. True, even Tabitha thinks that the way Louise treats Saito is a bit overboard, seeing how Saito is doing all he can to protect her.

If it were her instead, she could never do so.

But now Louise is also an important friend of hers, she had once ventured dangerously into Gallia with no regrets just to save Tabitha, according to others, she even gave up her nobility to do so.

Louise and Saito are both valuable companions, being the third person is not an option. It would destroy the relationship between the two.

Although she is very clear of this, yet why

Why every time she closes her eyes, the scene of Saito and herself riding Slipheed in the night sky appeared again and again, impossible to neglect.

Tabitha stood up. In order not to wake up Slipheed, she tiptoed across to the large mirror embedded into the wall.

The two moons brought moonlight in from the crevasses between blinds. With the help of the pure white moonlight, the mirror displayed the blurred figure of Tabitha. *That's alright*, Tabitha reassured, nodding to herself, *even though I'm already 16, I'm still so thin and weak, as if an underdeveloped child. Compared to the Louise a year ago, more-*

Being charming is not possible.

That's why it's alright

Tabitha suddenly felt very shocked

She had never considered the question if she had any charm

There is definitely something wrong with her, every thought is conflicted by another. The reason she came in front of the mirror was to reassure herself her looks are plain, not attractive to boys

Yet as soon as she realized, she feels extremely depressed. Tabitha stood still and stared at herself in the mirror. A random thought came across her mind and told her to take off her glasses.

Her blurred face appeared in the mirror.

Would she look more charming without glasses?

Tabitha edged close to the mirror, just to discover a teary girl. Finding it hard to believe her eyes would look like that, she gently hugged her own shoulders.

At this moment, someone knocked on her door

Deep in the middle of the night, who could it possibly be?

Expectations ran wild in her head, her heart pumping excitedly.

Yet at the same time, Tabitha rejected her own expectations.

How could it be possible?

It can't be that person, perhaps it's Kirche, visiting her in the middle of the night. Other than her, no one else seems to fit.

Tabitha, as if frozen, stopped moving.

"It's me"

Hearing this faint voice, Tabitha's heart leaped. In a rush to put on her glasses, she ran towards the door

"Is something the matter?" Even her questioning voice was slightly trembling.

"I have something to talk to you"

What could it be? Tabitha opened her door without a second thought.

Outside her doorstep was the familiar face appeared in her dreams countless times.

Using his Chevalier cloak to cover his face, Saito slipped into her room. Tabitha's looked everywhere, trying to avoid Saito noticing her expressions. With a small voice, she asked "Did you want to say something?"

Tabitha eyed Slipheed, who was sleeping soundly as indicated by her snoring. Looks like a bit of a rustle won't wake her up.

Saito revealed a solemn expression

"It's about the things we talked last night, I've considered it seriously"

"Eh?"

"About Tabitha succeeding the throne"

What exactly is Saito trying to say?

"What about it?"

"As the rightful heir to the throne, I reckon Tabitha should announce about succeeding the throne after all" Saito said a firm voice. Tabitha looked slightly darker than before.

"Were you also convinced by Romalia?"

"No, it's something I considered on my own. I was thinking about how to end this war as soon as possible, and this seems to be the best method"

"What happened?"

"From our situation right now, an attack from the Gallian army is bounded to happen soon. If so, it would really evolve into a war as crude as hell itself, there's no more time to wait for her highness"

Tabitha closed her eyes ‘‘Why am I hesitating?

Didn't I already make my choice to follow his decisions?

"I understand" Tabitha said with a voice as low as taking a breath. "Since you say so, I'll do it"

Saito looked at Tabitha with promising eyes "Relax, I will definitely protect, no matter what happens"

Tabitha was soon over taken by joy, and replied with a shaking voice "No, it's me who has to protect you"

"I want to protect you" Saito insisted, holding Tabitha's hands tightly. The

powerful pumps from her heart echoed in her own ears. When Tabitha realized that it was her own heartbeat, she was already close to the point of stop breathing.

In this moment where everything seemed to stay still, Tabitha asked the other "Why"

What's wrong with me? The calm part of Tabitha questioned herself

If she heard Saito's reply

If she was able to hear the same line said a million times in her dreams

"Because I love you"

To Tabitha, this sentence felt as if the tide from a distant beach, completely virtual. Thoughts stopped, her mind completely blank.

With no preparation beforehand, she unconsciously repeated the same lines in her dreams.

"You're lying"

"It's true, right now my mind is only filled with you"

Hearing this, Tabitha felt her barricade easily flooded and broken by the feelings long suppressed behind it. Although deep inside it silently cried out "these things are impossible", the cries where drowned by the wave of happiness. The feelings gushing out turned Tabitha into a completely defenseless weak girl.

Saito reached out his hand and lifted Tabitha's chin, slowly coming close with his lips. Tabitha also felt her breathing become hot, and closed her eyes self-consciously.

Tabitha felt a million years fly pass while their lips connect, Saito's lips, expanding on her small mount, freely shifting into other shapes.

Saito left softly from Tabitha's lips, then pressed forward to kiss her neck. Tabitha gently pushed Saito away.

"Don't you want to?"

Tabitha shook her head and pointed out Slipheed, still snoring peacefully on her bed, and replied with a voice close to crying "It’ll wake her up"

"I guess that's true, I'm sorry, I could control myself back then" Saito left from Tabitha's side, his hands on the handle of the door

"I hope you can promise me, please take this plan as the ultimate secret, because it would be disastrous if the other side heard of it. I will pretend as if I don't know anything during the day, I hope Tabitha will not reveal anything either. Although it may make you wonder, it's only because walls have ears will I play dumb till the very end. Do you understand"

Tabitha nodded her head willingly

"A few days later a messenger from Romalia will arrive, please do according to his orders"

"And you?"

"I will come again at night, I'll clarify things with you by then"

Tabitha nodded once again, completely oblivious from suspicion. All Tabitha cares now is their meeting next time, all other things can wait.

Chapter 7: Henrietta's Diplomatic Plan

As the royal escort was about to arrive above the grounds of Gallia's capital, Lutece, Henrietta stared in front of her with dignity. Across her the Captain of the Tristain Musketeers Agnès double checked the handgun carried on her waist.

"What is it? My captain"

"No...., I find it hard to remain at ease" Agnès said without attempting cover up her surrender to her feelings. Despite so, Henrietta's expression was as calm as ever.

Outside the windows of the sedan chair hanging under a dragon's belly, they could see the formation of Gallian dragon riders flying in parallel. Armed more heavily than usual, though by name their task is to be an escort, in actual they are putting Henrietta's royal transport under close watch.

"But your majesty...., rather than calling our current situation 'rash', I believe 'temerity' would fit better, visiting a country we just had a battle with a few days ago." Agnès said while sighing.

"Oh? Those people my army fought a few days ago were 'Gallian Rebels'. Besides, Romalia may have raised a crusade, my country remains at peace with Gallia. Therefore, officially there was never a conflict between my country and Gallia to begin with" Henrietta replied, her expressions continuing to remain as calm as ever. However....., her slightly trembling hands did not go unnoticed by Agnès. She may be keeping a good act, but in reality she must be very distressed.

"The Water Spirit Ondine Knights and the so-called Saint of Aquellia Miss Françoise are the headlines of the Romalian army, if Gallia condemned us for it, how do you plan to respond?"

"I'll simply tell them 'They belong to the Romalian army', it's not like this had never happened before. As for Louise, that right, I'll say she is a Romalia nun fighting under the name of God for Romalia. Mmn, no matter what reason it is, it'll work out"

Agnès looked discontent, and shook her head.

With no other company, Henrietta brought only Agnès with her. It could almost be said as charging barehanded into "enemy territory" Gallia.

Romalia's sudden announcement of a "Crusade" has caused quite a bit of a stir in Tristain. Almost all aristocrats and lords bore a grieving frown on their forehead.

Except for the over religious believers, Crusade is a synonym for nightmare. All nobles in the country will be gathered, young teens will be collected into armies, and the treasury will be emptied for a war. Plus...., even if they appeared victorious at the end, the only prize they get is an undeveloped desert and honor, hardly enough to cover the losses in the war. Most important of all, the chances of losing is considerably higher than the chances of winning. Many times in history have smaller countries sought their own destruction from the failure of crusades. If one had to trace the origin of Halkenia, it was also born from the rebellion of exhausted marquises.

Too many people. Compared to an unseen plot of land, their lives in front of them were much more important.

Since Henrietta's return to her own country, she had sworn to end this crusade and shut herself in her office thereafter to build a diplomatic plan towards Gallia.

A week later, after completion, Henrietta gathered all important nobles and told them "I will negotiate directly with the Gallian King himself"

Of course, Tristain's nobles, including Mazarin, even her own mother Queen Marion rejected the idea of Henrietta heading towards Gallia. The reasons for so are more than obvious. The head of a country heading towards a rather hostile country to "negotiate", never had an adventure so daring ever occurred since the long establishment of Halkenia. It is no wonder Agnès is feeling uneasy.

Henrietta even went as far as suggesting stepping down from the throne if they continued to refuse. Only then did the nobles agree.

"Your highness....., can you promise me one thing?"

"What is it"

"I understand that you feel responsible for the cause of this 'Crusade', but....., your majesty's life does not hold only the future of one person. If anything terrible happened to your majesty, our country will turn into chaos. Moreover, the possibility for this to happen isn't exactly low either"

"After defeating Gallia, Romalia will build their own army to recover the Holy lands. If we refuse to offer support, I will be forced to step down. Which means, either way our country can't escape the future of becoming chaotic. Heh, maybe things could turn even worse....., I'm sure you know how past armies set forth to recover the Holy lands have put the entire Halkenia into grieving"

Agnès could not make a good counter. Just the fact of stepping down from the throne is already too large a matter.

"Without me, the country can still work normally. Whether it's Prime Minister Mazarin, my mother, or the rest of the lords, the structure is still intact. On the other hand....., if anything as close as a large scaled war happened between us and the elves, the entire Halkenia will crumble soon afterwards" Henrietta gripped her hands even tighter.

"With my own life...., if that's already enough to place a bet, it is certainly, very inexpensive indeed."

"Looks like you have successfully refuted me" Agnès replied as if losing interest. Suddenly sensing something, Henrietta turned apologetic "Oh, sorry. About bringing you into this as well."

"That's alright. Since I volunteered for the army I was ready for anything. As the captain of your majesty's personal guards, compared to the safety of Halkenia, I am more concerned about your highness's safety."

"Ah, but I did not plan to come here just to lose my bet. I also made my own preperations. To King Joseph, this suggestion is just as exquisite" Henrietta directly pointed out, hugging her briefcase full of documents. Within the briefcase, the contents of the dipolmatic plans were almost under disagreement by all valued lords.

"Impossible" So the lords said. On the contrary, there was one single person who voted in approval.

That was Prime Minster Cardinal Mazarin. Kneeling in front of Henrietta, who had spent days without sleep planning every detail "I'm very glad to witness the growth of your majesty" was all he said.

Soon after the Palace Versailles, fanous for its vast empty area, appeared in front of them, the dragon riders who have been accompanying Henrietta's sedan chair from the borders onwards landed in the courtyard forming a circle.

The sedan chair Henrietta was riding in slowly landed in the middle of the circle. Guards who have been awaiting her arrival immediately rushed forward to open her door.

The simplicity of Henrietta's welcome shocked Agnès. There was no guards of honor, nor any sign of a band. Gallia is still considered as a influential empire of Halkenia, despite being at war, there are still standards for welcoming a Queen.

Agnès finally had a good feel of what a country with half of its people rebelling looks like. After surveying their welcome, Henrietta began to observe the Palace itself with no visible expression on her face.

There, she stopped, turning still like a statue.

"What's wrong, your highness?" Agnes also turned to where Henrietta was looking at, and could not help but gulp. Across the courtyard is what should be originally Joseph's castle, the remains of Grand Troyes. The blue, beautiful palace had collasped into a wreck.

"There were rumors of a rebel...., was that the cause of it" Agnes asked. The knights around them were just as unreadable, but with much experience in battle, Agnes could easily see what they were thinking - terror.

"....Looks good for a negotiation"

Under pressure from the chaos within, the morale of the small amount of knights plunging, if Gallia is under so much trouble already, then the chances of agreeing

to Henrietta's plans most certainly are higher.

A female wearing headbands appeared from the surrounding knights. Dressed in full black clothing, they emit some sort of suspicious aura. "Welcome to the Kingdom of Gallia. We heartily welcome Queen Henrietta's arrival."

The woman took a deep bow. Facing the head of country, yet not taking any attempt to remove their cloaks, Henrietta did not feel the need to return a bow, ignoring them as thin air.

"This way please. My master has been waiting" Not worried at all, the woman began walking. With no choice, Henrietta followed. Although displeased by the rude treatment, recalling the memory of Joseph's attitude at the international meeting helped Henrietta think otherwise.

The woman's voice sounded familiar to Agnes, who slightly frowned. Where exactly did they meet before? After some extensive searching through her memories, she finally remembered.

"I seem to have met you and your partners before" The woman turned her head around, smiling omniously towards Agnes.

"At Albion, no?" Agnes responded under her breath. Henrietta looked at Agnes from the corner of her eye.

"....She is the female who have assaulted Miss Françoise a few times. I fear the giant armoured golems were also led by her..."

This time, Henrietta gave a stern look.

"For your information, those are called **Golomontas**" The woman said without care.

The Queen and her Captain were brought to the dining room of the Guest Hall. Sitting at the other end of the dining table was Joseph, waiting alone.

Without guards nor maids, the dining hall looked empty and loney. There were not much food prepared on the desk either.

The woman wearing the headband....., like a shadow, Myoznitnirn stood

motionless behind Joseph.

Agnes pulled the out the chair facing Joseph, allowing Henrietta to sit down on it. As if replacing a greeting, Joseph yawned loudly.

"Morning, Queen Henrietta"

"Good day, King Joseph"

Across the long dining table, the two powers faced each other. With that the greetings ended, and so begins the negiotiation.

Although today's visit has been notified to Gallia, yet not a single diplomat, advisor, nor clerk was present. It was just a simple, cold talk.

Agnes took out the documents from Henrietta's briefcase and walked beautifully to Joseph's side, placing the documents down in front of him with respect.

Joseph casually held up the documents and flipped through it page by page. With no apparant change in expression after finish reading, supporting his head with his elbow, he turned towards Henrietta again.

"What an amazing suggestion. On behalf of Halkenia, announcing new status of one Halkenia King. All countries must follow his orders..... except for Romalia."

"Mhm. To me, the Pope of Romalia is only here because he gives a symbol of 'authority'"

"This says that there will be other supporters, is that true?"

"It is. Only under one condition, to sever all ties with elves. Just that. Why did you ally yourself with elves, King Joseph, all you wish for is the entire Halkenia to be under your command, isn't it? I plan to fulfill your wish"

"This is quite a staggering suggestion. But will Germania agree?"

"Germania's king was a filthy king to begin with. He even dare call himself king, this is the symbol of his low self-esteem. Those kind of dirty peasants will not dare go against Tristain and Gallia's combined will."

"This is very surprising indeed, Queen Henrietta. I originally thought you were going to ally with Romalia to invade my country, but here you are instead offering alliance with our country! You are a brilliant politician! I really wronged you!"

"Thank you for your exaggerated praise. Instead of elves, it would be me who will be honoring you with the throne of Halkenia"

A smile appeared on Joseph's face. "What is your goal?"

Henrietta instantly displayed a charming expression and replied firmly "If the ties between Gallia and elves are severed, the 'Crusade' will therefore end. Compared to a war involving every single person on this world, I'd rather ally myself with the 'incompetent King'"

"I will be in direct conflict with Romalia, this is fighting fire with fire?"

"Even in the same hell, I'd want to choose the good side"

Joseph nodded his head in pleasure. "Now this is what politics is about. Alright. Well then, I have my own request"

"what would it me"

"be my wife"

Henrietta couldn't help but widen her eyes. "Oh my, you are actually serious."

Henrietta bit her lips. For the first time in their meeting hatred could be seen in her eyes. Henrietta nodded her head. "I agree"

"Your Highness!" Agnes who was silent all along cried out. Henrietta held her back with her hand, then nodded again.

"It would be my pleasure to do so" Henrietta's body was in complete rejection.

Agnes understood that when Henrietta said "she would do anything to stop this crusade", she meant it.

Joseph seemed to look at Henrietta happily, eventually bursting into laughters.

Joseph's laughters echoed through the entire dining hall.

"Hahaahahahhaah! Don't take it seriously! I'm not very forgiving. I would never sleep with a woman who doesn't like me"

Henrietta's blushed from her self brought shame. Joseph stood up and walked towards Henrietta. With his big hands, he held Henrietta's chin.

Just about to draw her sword out, Agnes suddenly felt the statue behind her hold down her hands stealthly.

"You sly fox" Joseph said teasingly. "Do you plan to cut off my head at night"

Henrietta used her best bluffing voice and replied "You, you have seen through me!"

Joseph's smile slowly became fixed on his face. "I like it. I like it more and more. I can't believe I took you as just another little girl! This is going to be the best joke ever! You are absolutely comparable to the ancient warlords! Plus you are brave and smart. You will become a good Queen, Queen Henrietta"

Joseph returned to his seat. With a snap of his fingers, the status released Agnes's wrists. Agnes coughed painfully.

With a quick glance at Agnes, Henrietta continued "....then, please hurry and send out notices. With the support of Tristain, Albion and Germania behind you, Romalia will lose their will as well"

Yet, Joseph did not reply.

"King Joseph?"

Joseph scratched his head as if finding it hard to speak "But. Very sadly, I have no intention to go with this suggestion"

"This there something missing? Isn't it not enough to have the world?"

"If I were an ambitious man....., I would go with your plan without hesitation. But, that is not all. Not all" Joseph shook his head. Using a gangster's tone, he firmly said "I do not want this world"

"What do you mean?" Henrietta felt an omnious aura seep into her mind, rapidly

filling her up. For some reason, she was reminded those terrifing stories she read when she was small.

"Oh, there is no need to be ashamed of your 'misconception'. No one would have complaints against your suggestions. Even myself can't think up of better 'plans'. This is outstanding work. But..., you are heading in the wrong direction. I'm afraid even god himself could not have expected this."

"What are you suggesting?"

"You mentioned before - 'even in the same hell, you'd want to choose the good side'"

"That's right"

"I simply want to see that hell"

"You must be joking"

"By no means. I simply just want to witness hell. I want to see the unbearable, the never seen before, the hell corrupting my mind"

Henrietta felt weak all over. Agnes nervously supported the almost falling Henrietta. This makes less and less sense. Originally she thought Joseph was an ambitious man trying to get the whole world, seeing his actions of assaulting "void" and now allying with elves, even going as far as attacking Romalia with a so called "rebellion".

But the man in front of her eyes is denying all of it.

Not only saying "that's not all", he went on and said that he "simply want to see that hell" this kind of senseless lines.

But....., he is serious about what he says. The solemn expression of Joseph saying all this, seemed kind of sad.

"Therefore, I decided to create a small version of hell with the 'crusade'. It's also the only reason why you are so active. Since you are here already, why don't you visit some of Gallia, Queen Henrietta"

Meanwhile, at Carcassonne.....

As mentioned the night before, the Saito at day was as if a different person from last night, as if the things never happened last night, Saito went on to have a conversation at the dining hall with a completely natural face

"Hey, Tabitha, morning"

Tabitha responded with a nod, all while her eyes fixed on her book. Afterwards Saito joined the Water Spirit Ondine Knights and began their usual talks.

Louise was together with Tiffania eating bread. Looking both of them Tabitha couldn't help but slightly sigh, the guilty feelings towards Louise conflicting with the unexpectedly warm, sweet ones lingering in her heart. Did the things really happen last night?

Yet.... the warm touch still lingering on her neck confirmed its genuinity, the places touched by Saito's lips burning ever so hot.

Tabitha bit her lips and casually flipped another page of the book.

Since when, Kirche had already sat down next to her. Instantly Kirche realised something was off with her best friend. After resisting and finally succumbing to her urge, she whispered in Tabitha's ears "You, it's time for a confession, what happened?"

Tabitha shook her head. "....Nothing"

About the events of succeeding the throne,..... or the things that occured last night, none of them could be mentioned to Kirche.

"You know that there are no secrets between us, right?"

Tabitha decided to ignore problems of their friendship for the time being, then stood up, indicating she hopes Kirche will leave this matter for now.

Carcassonne's view was bathed in the warm morning sunlight. Tabitha suddenly found the true meaning of finding the "warmth" of the sun, her body given a new

supply of happiness.

A feeling was persistantly nagging her, nagging her how the night is so much to look forward to. This unbearable anxious wait surpasses even coronation, surpasses all desire to seek revenge....

Next to a flowerbed at the side of the road, Tabitha stopped her footsteps.

A handful of sky blue coloured irises were blossoming furiously. Remembering her dull room, Tabitha couldn't help but reach out and pick a few. Seeing flowers of the same colour as her own hair, Tabitha felt herself grow red.

At night, when her door was knocked on....

Tabitha gave the already asleep Slipheed one more spell of tranquility, allowing it to enter an even deeper slumber. Slipheed's breathing became even heavier.

Anxious all over, Tabitha hurriedly opened the door. Dressed the same as last night, Saito suddenly hugged her. Letting it go, Tabitha buried her head into Saito's chest.

Without saying anything else, Saito lifted Tabitha's chin and planted a kiss.

Tabitha closed her eyes, allowing the other to do whatever he wishes. Since last night, she had realised that it feels very comfortable.

Saito lightly carried Tabitha and put her into bed.

Tabitha's face surfaced an very uncommon colour - faint red. Her cute small chest also puffed up and down out of anxious and excitement.

Discovering that the desk was decorated with a blue iris inside a winebottle, Saito smiled.

"Flower picking? Now this is unusual"

"....It's because this room, doesn't have much in it."

"That's better" Saito took the flower out from the winebottle and placed it into Tabitha's hair. Like a hairband, the iris fits perfectly into Tabitha's hair.

Saito took off the shy Tabitha's glasses.

"...Glasses."

"You look prettier without it."

"can't see anything."

"Don't you shut your eyes when you're shy?" Saito pressed his lips against hers, lasting for quite a moment before leaving.

".....Eh?"

"I have to go, there's not much time, it's alright, there's nothing to worry about." Just as sudden as his entry, Saito took his leave.

The left behind Tabitha could only stare at his silhouette.

When the door was knocked on again, full of expectations, Tabitha opened her door wide just to find Julio behind it, her facial expressions immediately fading.

"That really fits you, Princess Charlotte."

Tabitha covered her head. After plucking the beautifully placed flower, she carefully returned it to its winebottle.

Julio changed to his solemn expression and bowed.

"I am here to recieve you, although I believe you have already heard of it from Saito."

That was how Saito put it last night, that the messenger from Romalia will arrive soon....., forgetting all "suspicions" Tabitha earnestly followed the orders of the other, nodding her head in agreement.

Her first romance, has dulled her assessment abilities.

Chapter 8: Coronation

The next morning....

Saito woke up from the loud cheers.

"Wha....?"

Sleeping next to him, Louise seemed to have been woken up from the same reason. Rubbing his half-closed eyes, Saito stood up and opened the windows.

The muffled cheers burst from the window and flooded into the entire room. Because of the holes on the walls, living together with them Malicorne and Tiffania also seemed to have been awakened by it.

"What the heck is that noise?"

"What, in the world, happened?"

While mumbling, they all gathered around.

Since this hotel was built on top of a cliff that has a perfect view of the entire Lelion river, (just like every other Carcassone house,) if they look outside, they can fully see the situation below.

The Romalian army spanning across the plains gave thunderous cheers.

"What is that?" Malicorne pointed below.

Looks like, at the center of the Romalian army, was a huge stage. One could say it almost looks like an altar. *Feels just like the stage at a concert,* Saito thought.

"Are they preparing an opera or what?" Louise openly expressed her thoughts.

"Hey hey, we are already in a war, why would they bother for an opera?"

"How am I supposed to know. Maybe they want to do some boring religious play, to undermine the other side's morale or something...."

"Won't they just become more irritated when they see this kind of stuff?" Just when he was saying, Malicorne used the spell of telescoping.

"Oi! The Pope is on the altar! Are they preparing some sort of offering?"

Feeling ominous, the group looked at each other, then all rushed to head down to Lelion river. In their journey, they also encountered the rest of the Water Spirit Ondine knights and Kirche. The only missing person was Tabitha.

Sprinting, Saito asked "Huff, Kirche, where's Tabitha?"

".....Hm. When I looked for her, she was already gone. That kid, where could she run to so early in the morning."

The ominous feeling exacerbated.

Dashing from the streets of Carcassone to the steppes of the plains, the cheers became more and more thunderous as they approached. Other than the black and white flag of the crusade, even the flag of Kingdom Romalia was flying in the winds. Next to it, one could see a flag with two spears crossing each other on it.

"What's this? Isn't that the flag of Gallia?" Kirche exclaimed. Pope Vittorio Cervale stood right under the flag, surveying his surroundings with disdainful eyes. Blocked by surrounding guards, Saito and the others were impeded from further progress and could only observe the development from a distance.

Vittorio raised both hands, silencing the fuelled cheering. All of the people began putting up a praying posture.

"What's that. A make shift cathedral? There's no need to come all the way here to do that...." Kirche sounded a bit shocked.

Vittorio's prayers last around 30 minutes. During the time, Saito and the others little choice but to maintain the same posture.

When the prayers have finally ended, Vittorio spread his hands again.

"Respectable believers of god Brimir, today, I bring everyone joyful news." His voice has been amplified through the use of magic, enough to reach the ears of the Gallian camp on the other side of the river.

"Across the river, loyal lords to the Gallian mad King, please join us for this news."

Immediately, all sorts of complaints sounded throughout the Gallian camp.

"What the heck! If you want to preach then no thanks! We have much better things to do!"

"Return to the dump you came from to do your praying to God!"

Vittorio smiled, ignoring these voices and continuing his speech.

"Lords of the Gallian Kingdom, you are making a big mistake. The so called King of yours, is not the rightful heir to Gallia"

Saito's face was drained of color.

"What are you trying to say?"

"The King you loyally serve, is the person who killed the next right King, Great Duch Orléans, and took the throne for himself like a thief. What kind of person is everyone trying to serve loyal for? I hope you understand that this is an enormous insult to even our God and Founder."

"Even so, there is no place for a horrible monk like you to make your comments!"

"So this is the words of a person invading other countries! Who else could the real thief be!"

Vittorio's corner of his mouth twisted slightly more.

"We are not thieves, nor here to control your country or land. Rather, we are here to restore your kingdom under the rightful rule. As the servants of God and Founder, we, will never concur with that self-proclaimed King allying himself with heretics. As a respectable believer of Brimir yourself, you should fully

agree with this."

Saito already wanted to rush forward. With events developing to this stage, without further ado Louise and the others already realized the true message this whole act was trying to deliver. Before they could do anything, paladins had already come forth, stopping the footsteps of Saito and the others with drawn swords and spears.

"No trouble around here! Listen well to the Pope!"

"Let me now introduce the real rightful heir to this kingdom. The daughter of the deceased Grand Duke of Orléans, Princess Charlotte her majesty."

Below the altar, priests split both sides to make way for the appearance of Tabitha. She was not wearing the usual clothing of the Academy of Magic, but a grand suit designed for royal kings and queens. On the face of hers without the usual glasses and dabbed lightly with makeup. Unlike her common attitude, this unerringly displayed the majestic hidden under her usual expressionless face, even enough to match one of what would be the princess of Halkenia.

"Tabitha!" Kirche screamed with anger. Of course, this voice was hardly heard by anyone overwhelmed by the barrage of more thunderous cheers, much less reaching Tabitha's ears.

"Princess Charlotte!?"

"Impossible! Wasn't she assassinated back then as well?"

"No, I heard she was stripped of her title and sent to study abroad at Tristain." All sorts of shocked cries spread through the Gallian camp.

"How dare you bring us this fraud!" Furious to the degree of losing himself, this cry could be heard even on this side. This person came from no other than the person who have competed with Saito a couple times, Duke **Scarron**. "How dare you make a fool of us with the deceased daughter of the Grand Duke of Orléans! Shameless! How much longer are you going to mess with us!"

"Then, would you like to confirm for yourself, whether or not this is a fraud?" Announced the Pope without a slightest hint of backing down. He named a few nobles, whom should all know Tabitha's identity as heir.

With **Scarron** as lead, they boarded the small boat and arrived into the Romalian camps, finally walking onto the altar.

Around ten or more aristocrats took turn to check for imperfections in Tabitha. After a considerable amount of time.... one of them raised the staff in his hands, chanting the spell of removal. Confirming there were no magic on Tabitha's body, they knelt down in unison.

Duke **Scarron** said with a difficult voice "Long time no see..... Princess Charlotte your highness"

Yells immediately boiled from the Gallian camp. A large crowd of aristocrats came rushing to the sandbank, one of them, Bart Castlemont.

Taking off the metal mask of his face, waving both his hands he cried "I am leader of the Eastern Roses, Bart Castlemont! I hereby declare, to welcome the returning of Princess Charlotte to receive her rightful throne, the establishment of the Gallian volunteers! We seek only the orders of Princess Charlotte!"

The Gallia camps started to collapse into chaos. They had too little time to contemplate such a sudden announcement. To further excite their already shaking faith in their Gallian King, Vittorio continued "Loyal Gallian lords, please consider with your intelligent and brave brain, consider your pure flawless self, in this old, ancient country, who is best suited for Emperor? Is it the one at Lutece, the lazy, incompetent king who killed his brother for the crown? Or..." Placing his right hand onto Tabitha's shoulders. "Or is it the one standing here, here to receive St. Aegis the 32nd's personally executed coronation, the young queen overflowing with talent?"

Many aristocrats and soldiers gathered at the sandbanks at the side of Castlemont. Of course..... Having things like the entire army defecting to this side is pretty much out of topic. Everyone had little time to think carefully over this sudden development.

"Think about it. There's plenty of time, but not long. Right now there are two fleets of ships heading this way. It will carry the now Empress, Queen Charlotte, to take Lutece back from the dishonorable thief. As servant of God and Founder, I agree that this real Emperor, should deserve to sit on that throne. So, gentleman, do you wish to bear the filthy name of being a rebel army?"

Although not much, but the soldiers, aristocrats gathered at Castlemont's side increased yet again. At the Gallian camps all sorts of arguments, evens conflicts grew. At various places, one can even see wands drawn.

Saito trembled from this sight.

Tabitha? Why?

Damn. The Romalia must have said something good to fool Tabitha. It must be it. Although the exact method is still uncertain, it was definitely enough to change Tabitha's mind.

The morale in the Gallian camp shook even more. If this goes on, everything will progress exactly the way the Romalian Pope wishes to. No matter how perfect the plan Henrietta deceived is right now, once this movement become large enough, no one will be able to stop the crusade anymore.

"....If this goes on Gallia will be under the control of Romalia. If so, we are helpless to stop the crusade." Louise said regretfully. With things this way already, even breaking through the Paladins, running all the way to change Tabitha's idea would be too late.

There were no other ways to stop the already rolling boulder.

Vittorio pointed to a small dot in the skies of the southwest direction. Where he was pointing to, a large fleet of ships could be seeing pressing forwards.

"Even this is calculated, perfect" Saito said sarcastically while wiping the sweat off his forehead.

Sitting at the stern of "Harold, Orléans", was Claville. Next to him, Viscount Julian commented "Never thought that this would turn into a real rebel fleet. The changes possible in politics is just stunning, just like a pair of cat eyes" (Note: The size of the iris of cat eyes changes rapidly under different light stimulation, here it is used as a common slang.)

This was not said with any sarcasm, but one of his real thoughts. Stroking his beard, Claville replied "Now we're not a 'rebellion' anymore. This is the official dual-use fleet of Gallia."

This bunch of people knows perfectly that a few weeks ago they were still members of Gallian dual-use fleet. Not long afterwards were they approached by Joseph to disguise as a rebel fleet, but the failure of the plan and their fear towards the crusade has soon turned them into real rebels. Now.... under what the Pope claimed to be "preparation for the rightful king", they return to the glorious title of being Gallia's dual-use fleet.

It was only yesterday when Pope Vittorio Cervale issued his orders to this fleet at St. Marion. Though said they are a rebel fleet, it was only forced on them due to the circumstances.

To the Claville who barely has any motivation for any work, who even went into conflict with his own mates, the only reason that is making up stand up again, is that order "Bring the country all the way to the capital."

With this, he had all the reason to ignore the bunch still loyal to Joseph. There was no more need to treat them as his mates anymore.

"It's a week already. I believe future script writers will have a headache over the things happening now. Switching names again and again is a bit..... Speaking of which, did the bunch in Romalia really found Princess Charlotte? Don't tell me, the found a fake to substitute her. I hope they won't do anything as dumb as that."

"Will it be the real one?"

Claville nodded.

"Though say there's always this rumor of 'being assassinated' and all sorts..... but it looks like she had been shipped off to some other country. There are also rumors of being locked somewhere in a castle..... but she should still be alive. Maybe she made it out."

"I suppose Romalia put their hands in?"

"From the current situation, it's certainly quite possible. Seems like Princess Charlotte have some luck."

For his fleet to be rescued by that "Princess Charlotte", Claville could have never dreamed of it. He himself has even seen Tabitha using the name "Charlotte" in

person.

"Ahh, the great Kingdom of Gallia, is going to become the backyard of Romalia from now on? The Pope is even greater than the founder of our country Great King Julio. Great King Julio only managed to take conquer half of Gallia, yet this young Pope is already capable of taking all of it into his pockets."

"Pfft. No matter who holds the power to this Kingdom, it's definitely better than that 'incompetent King'. That guy joined with Bidashal to do some sort of weird research at St. Marion. The results were those Knight Golems. Now who knows what sort of evil is he doing in Lutece, he's completely the devil himself! Why doesn't he just go someplace on his own to do whatever he wants! We might as well send him to the actual hell!?" Bearing hatred feelings, Claville said. Most likely he have forgotten how he once fell into the incompetent King's plans himself as well, doing things betraying God and Founder.

"We must let Princess Charlotte to board this ship bearing her father's name, and head in victory all the way to Lutece. Only will that clean the wrong doings we have borne. Being able to help in this, don't you feel much honored? Viscount."

"Right, right. That sure is very honoring indeed." He replied with a non-caring tone.

"Ho, we can almost see Carcassonne. No matter how many times we pass by, I always feel the need to question why would they ever build a city in this sort of place. To be honest, I really am curious." Viscount Julian said, looking at the twisting "serpentrouge" around ten miles in front of them.

The two shores of Lelion could also be seen, as well as the Romalia and Gallian camps.

According to the plan, this ship will carry the already coronated Queen Charlotte "her majesty", raise the Gallian flag, then bombard the persistent remains of the Gallian camp.

Afterwards, with little power left, the Gallian camps will have little choice but to surrender. Finishing off with these foolish people, they will be able to steer all the way to the unprepared Lutece.

This is a mission even simpler than training to sail seas.

But.... tragedy stuck.

The sailor on the mast seemed to report something.

"10 O’clock! There's something flying towards us!"

"What's with 'something'. What kind of report is this!" The co-captain complained.

"Dragons? No, not dragons! That's.....a strange stone statue?"

What a report.

Claville and Julio also looked in the same direction.

So that's what he was talking about, a miraculously winged object like a dragon was flying this way. On closer inspection, it is a stone statue. It isn't so wrong to mix it up with a dragon. After all, as a stone statue, its movements were way too fast.

"What's that? A scout?"

Or some sort of secret messenger?

That grey, devilish shaped statue did not attempt to land on the decks, but rather tagged along below their ships. Feeling very sick, Viscount Julio immediately issued orders. "Shoot down that thing!"

This order came too late.

Ssss.....!

Like a cracking sound of an egg shell, the statue gripped tightly on the surface of the "jewel of fire", crisscross markings began to appear.

Since Joseph casted an "explosion" spell, leaving wounds invisible to the naked eye, the fragile jewel, could not sustain the power of the rolling fire inside.

Not particularly surprising.

All the energy from burning an entire forest, congregated into only 5 jewels of

fire.

Flames started to spill from the cracks, expanding silently at a fearful degree. In an instant, the flames had already expanded a hundred thousand times of its original size.

The sailors of the dual use fleet, did not have time to cry out, and were swallowed by the gigantic fireball.

The jewel of fire burnt more than half of the dual use fleet like paper. The gunpowder carried onboard were also ignited, created a deafening noise that sounded through the sky.

The remaining army was also affected by the enormous flames, suffering extensive damage.

A scene from hell.

"Did he say it would have a radius of 10 miles? Why's it only 5?"

Aboard a speedboat, Joseph complained while looking at the distant bright shine. Guarding next to him, Myoznitnirn responded to her master's dissatisfaction. "That was the smallest sized stone used. Bidashal said it is only next to the one of highest grade."

"Is that so" Joseph scratched his head.

Being tied both hands, Henrietta could only observe behind the both of them horrified at the progress of things.

"Let you experience hell", was what Joseph said. Turns out it was not some metaphor, but hell literally.

Henrietta trembled at the sight of the fire jewels capable of burning half of the dual use fleets into smoke.

The only time had seen something similar was at **Tarbes**. It was witnessed during the war of **Tarbes**, Louise's explosion.

Although the magic that destroyed the fleet of Albion was similar...., there is still an incomparable distance in scale and destructiveness. Louise's "explosion" could wreck the wind stones carried onboard, even burn the ship's sails, but would never kill.

The thing just now, was just like a small sun Henrietta trembled at her own thoughts.

A fireball of radius reaching 5 miles, Henrietta could have never imagined anything similar.

With her sword and guns seized, both hands tied similar behind her back, Agnes seemed to bear the same thought. Described as having a steel heart, even she closed her eyes and displayed her fragile feminine side.

"You.... do you know what you have done?" Tears came from Henrietta's eyes. "Do you know how many soldiers was that fleet carrying?"

"At last, more than the number on this poor vessel." Joseph joked. Henrietta could not understand, how he could even smile after witnessing this scene.

On this vessel, other than Joseph and Myoznitnirn, Henrietta and Agnes these two pair, there were no one else.

Driving the vessels were lots of stone statues. Not knowing how they were taught, these statues were as trained as sailors, driving the ship with swift

movements.

Simultaneously control so many stone statues, no matter which level of mage it is, none of them will be able to achieve this feat. Yet here they are, working ever so elegantly.

"Well then, let's try this big one here" Joseph took out the so called "second to highest grade", "jewel of fire".

"You.... are the void user of Gallia?" Watching him clearly recite the same chant as Louise's spell, Henrietta realized that he was the "void user of Gallia".

Even though the chant is completely the same, to any pair of ears, they could not sound more different. Louise's spell was full of hope, her courage to change tomorrow for the better

However, Joseph's spell was nothing like it. If one was forced to describe it, only "despair" would fit. It sounds as if he was giving up something.

That despair for some reason reassured Henrietta, guiding her back to the normal world.

Which is the real void? In the midst of extreme confusion, Henrietta suddenly thought up of an unimportant matter.

Finishing his spell, Joseph focused his spell into the "Jewel of fire" in his hands. The adjusted spell of "explosion" cracked the strong shell elves constructed.

Cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha, the fire jewel began emitting ear piercing vibrations. The immense amount of energy within found their exit and began their riot.

Finally clearing her head, Henrietta dashed to Joseph's food, trying to grab his hand. Her efforts, unfortunately, were impeded by a statue pouncing on her with unnatural power, ending up sprawling up over the deck.

"I invited you to visit hell with me, yet this is what you give me"

"You are insane!"

At Carcassone there's the Romalia army, there's Louise, Tiffania, the Water Spirit

Ondine Knights, as well as Saito....

The reason she left them in the dark about her visit to Gallia was because she did not want more trouble for them. If they heard of her coming alone to Lutece, they would have ignored all danger and rush to Lutece.

Turns out her decisions were all wrong.

Never would she imagine Joseph using such cruel tactics.... combining the power of void with destructive magic. Far far far from what Henrietta ever imagined.

"If I can do it, I would surely like to become insane. At least you're happier while insane." Joseph mumbled with a self-deprecating voice and threw the "fire jewel" off the vessel. Prepared, a stone statue caught the "fire jewel" and flew off in the distance.

Henrietta felt her heart fill with black despair. *At least let me go insane"* As if rejecting temptation from within, Henrietta yelled "Run! Everyone! Run!"

Expectations of the dual use fleet were suddenly replaced with a fireball of a size unseen before. Both camps along the Lelion river were silent.

The ball of flames rose like the sun, then disappeared in front of their eyes.

The couple dozen of war vessels vanished like a magic trick without a trace. Even the smartest person will have to spend half a minute of time to catch up that they were burn to ashes.

Unable to perceive the events, the entire army stood dumbly watching the empty sky as if expecting the fleet to come back anytime soon. A couple minutes later, only when an even more gigantic ball of fire appeared, removing the remnants of what was the dual use fleet, did the panic started to spread.

Both soldiers of Romalia and Gallia camps started to scurry like ants from an anthill.

Enemies? Allies? For both sides, this question isn't exactly important anymore.

Natural instincts of fear occupied both armies.

But where could they run to? Attempting to outrun an expanding fireball of 10 miles radius, no matter how you look at it, is an impossible feat.

"What is that...."

In the middle of scurrying soldiers, Saito choked, stunned.

The Water Spirit Ondine Knights carried slight rigid smiles. Something as unrealistic as this could only be taken as a joke.

Louise shook Saito's shoulders back and forth. "It's void! That's Gallia's void! I'm sure of it!"

"There's a spell like this? Just like the sun itself falling...." Louise slapped the dumbfound Saito's face.

"Get a hold of yourself! Things have already turned out like this! Just run!"

Hearing Louise's words, finally waking from their trance, the teens began running.

"Run! Saito!" Exactly that moment, with a whoosh, a blue shadow dropped down and grabbed both Saito and Louise, just to take off again.

"Slipheed!"

Looking below them, Saito cried out "Oi! You're only saving us? What about everyone else?"

"They won't make it anyway! Chirp!" Slipheed cried back. True. Magic or not, escaping from the grasps of such a gigantic fireball is impossible.

"That.... is the release of elven magic! Probably an explosion of a 'fire jewel'! With human magic, there is nothing you can do! Chirp!" Slipheed cried with an anxious voice.

"What do we do?"

"Only you are capable of stopping that person! Even if sister won't be able to do

a thing!"

Using the powers of her vision, Slipheed began searching the skies. With eyes far exceeding the ability of human eyes, Slipheed discovered a lone vessel at the northeast direction.

"There!"

Not sure if the intentions of Slipheed were understood in the midst of the chaos, Paladins riding pegasi also began flying.

Leading the pegasuses, carrying a void user in her claws, Slipheed flew at top speed in the direction of Joseph.

Chapter 9: The Exit of the Labyrinth

When Joseph released the "fire jewel" from his hands, wrecking the fleet named under his brother's name without mercy, there was not a single expression of emotion.

He merely muttered "The construction of that fleet, how much did it cost?"

"The dual-use fleet, began construction ten years ago for the purpose of resisting the Albion fleet. Accordingly, within five years, it spent half of the country's income for its construction." Myoznitnirn replied calmly.

"Such a valuable item turned to ashes in minutes. How disappointing"

"You.... are you sad?"

"Hardly. Compared to this, letting the toy boat my father bought for me sink in the pond was more saddening. Speaking of which, I already lost track of how many times Charles won. Not a single win here though."

Her body restricted of freedom by the stone statue, Henrietta painfully interrupted "A fleet of that size..... how many..... how many do you think it carried? Ten thousand, no, at least a couple times more. You turn so many people, into ashes in a blink of an eye, yet you compare this to a toy sinking in a pond..... even the devil will seem more compassionate in front of you"

"What do you understand? How would you possibly know how I feel? Bathed in victory, blessed by everyone, wearing a crown, how could you possibly understand me?" Joseph kicked Henrietta with hatred. Witnessing the tragedy in front of her, Henrietta's heart finally broke. The remaining strand of "hope" in her heart was snapped. Dragged into her flow of emotions, Henrietta finally cried.

"Feel sad? You... are heartbroken aren't you? How admiring" Joseph grabbed

Henrietta's face, and lifted it, facing each other. "Give me your sadness. Give it to me. If you can do it, I will do anything you want. Everything. This kingdom, this world, anything"

"God.... please stop this man. For the sake of our next generations, before this world is destroyed, before everything is turned into ashes....."

"Then I guess God himself should also witness what the world would look like in ashes" Joseph took the last "jewel of fire" handed from Myoznitnirn. This one was twice the size of the last one. Lovingly, Joseph stroked the "jewel". The bright "fire" in the transparent container gave a brilliant shine, illuminating Joseph's palm.

If this was delivered to the ground.....all lands in its radius, 10 miles and above, will be charred black. Whether it's grass or tree, human or animal.... all life on land will be burnt to nothing, ashes to ashes.

Including his army sworn loyal to him, and his brother's only child, his niece Charlotte.

"Will I cry" Asking multiple times himself, the question sounded again in his mind.

"This time, will I cry?"

When the world is roasted.... what if he still won't cry... what would he do next?

He was confused himself. The literally world of nothing. Tears, emptiness, sadness, nothing. Only "zero".

Needless the reminder from Henrietta, he was clear himself. This is not what he wanted to see.

But....

Looking at the weeping Henrietta, Joseph thought *The only one who can stop me.... will be Charles*

If he reconciles me.... yields to me.... I wouldn't have been so desperate

However, even to God, this is not possible. After all, Charles is not alive anymore.

Joseph understood. He really understood that even when the world was turned into ashes, he still be unable to cry.

Still, a sense of hope remains.

He could not find any other way.

What was pushing Joseph to deliver despair to the world, was actually hope itself. Although it was a dim colored hope, it kept pushing Joseph forward, supporting his body.

Joseph began chanting the "void" spell again.

Since this time the "jewel" was of a larger size, its container would be even stronger. If the "explosion" was not powerful enough, no damage would be left.

Right this moment.

The vessel began wobbling. Joseph looked in the far distant.

A wind dragon scaled in blue, leading a couple of pegasi was speeding this way. One of the paladins on a pegasus seemed to be chanting wind magic.

To protect her master's spells from being interrupted, Myoznitnirn released a few stone statues. Controlled by Myoznitnirn, powered up to the maximum, the stone statues dashed towards the welcomed gate-crashers.

At various places, stone statues and paladins began to commence their aerial battles.

"Jo-Joseph my lord...." Joseph was about to continue chanting.... in that instant, he was flung backwards by the explosion in front of his eyes, the recoil slamming him to the other edge of the ship.

"Urg...."

The jewel of fire rolled from his hand onto the deck. The explosion also pushed

the stone statue holding down Henrietta away. Suddenly regaining freedom, Henrietta spotted the rolling jewel and caught it in her mouth urgently.

Looking around, she saw Louise riding on the wind dragon. Seems like this explosion was the effects of Louise's spell. *Thank you, everyone* Thanking everyone in her mind, Henrietta leapt off the side of the ship.

"Your Majesty!" Seeing Henrietta jump off, Louise cried out. Driving away the stone statues around them, Slipheed descended rapidly. Just as she was about to catch her.... a speeding statue came out of nowhere, snatching the Queen away.

Sharp claws pried open the jewel clamped tightly by Henrietta's mouth. As if determining her as useless afterwards, it threw her away uncaringly.

Slipheed freefell again, finally fetching her body.

"Are you hurt?" With little time to celebrate their reunion, Louise asked urgently. Sitting on the back of Slipheed, Henrietta yelled with a pale face "Ignore me! The stone! Hurry!"

Louise nodded, quickly chanting her spell again.

It was the "explosion" spell. Because she had used it just now, she was unable to target larger enemies. This was her limit. During the "crusade", Louise had already used her magic too many times.

Yet still she fought for focus, chanting the spells of "void". Unfortunately.... her chant could not be finished in time, releasing only a fraction of its maximum power.

A few stone statues the paladins had failed to suppress began attacking Louise and the rest.

"Ah!" In response to Henrietta and Louise's cries, Saito pulled the trigger of his AK at the stone statues. Using three-point bursts, it easily burst the heads of the statues, but bullets quickly ran out. It was the last clip.

In midair, swords have barely any use. Saito gritted his teeth.

To protect her side, Louise was forced to use "explosion". The small scaled

explosion rippled around Slipheed, sending the statues flying.

"Quickly! Louise! Hurry and stop that insane man! If... if we don't make it, everything will turn into ashes!" Henrietta shouted.

"I'll go. Slipheed, get to the ship!"

Slipheed acknowledged with a cry.

Louise stared at the small vessel. What was going on? With this small ship, carrying only two people, bring down the entire dual use fleet? The Romalia and Gallia armies, reaching a hundred and fifty thousand lives, were about to face the same fate as the dual use fleet.

The Founder's magic.

The incomparable power of the Founder.

When combined with the destructiveness of "void".....

Facing this new threat, Louise began to feel fear.

In these cases.... only her familiar can be trusted.

On the decks, Joseph can be seen chanting. Protecting him was more than a dozen statues controlled by Myoznitnirn.

For the first time in her life, she caught a glimpse of Joseph at such a close distance.

Having the same colored hair as Tabitha.... a slender but fit body. Handsome looking, it was as if a male beauty carefully carved.

From the mouth of his came the chants of the spell.

Ironically, hearing his chant gave an immense boost in Saito's bravery. Natural instincts in Saito's body found it irritating.

If he were to finish his chant...

Recollecting the jewel just now, Saito felt as if his spine was stabbed with an ice

pick. Leaping off Slipheed's body, Saito landed onto the deck. Already, Myoznitnirn's stone statues were in front of him.

With horns like antlers on goats, strong developed muscles, bat wings, this statue looked like nothing but bad news. Saito found it just as bad looking as Joseph himself.

It was him who made this jewel! Anger shook his soul.

The runes on his left hands glowed. Facing the incoming statue, Saito delivered a slash, cutting its body in half.

With the blade swinging, one by one statue rolled down the deck, heads, body parts, so on.

Whoever it is, no sword master could match up to the speed of Saito's slash.

Reaching his boiling point, no one can stop Saito. One after another statues tumble down. A dozen or more statues, completely annihilated in a mere 15 seconds.

"Looks like you are out of weapons" Holding Derflinger, Saito cautiously pressed towards Myoznitnirn.

Despite seemingly in trouble, Myoznitnirn's smile was not a bit shaken.

"What!" Next moment, Saito was subjected to a horrifying sight.

The already cut in half statues crawled near their bodies and reattached themselves like clay dolls, standing up again.

Standing next to Joseph, Myoznitnirn's mouth turned into a dazzling smile.

"These statues aren't just any statues. They are all enhanced with the power of water. Though their power can hardly match a **Golomonta's**, they are close to immortal. How many times you dice them, it will only be a waste of time."

Again, the statues assaulted.

Even after defeated, they will revive again. There's no end to it. Saito began

turning defensive.

"What's wrong? Without your weird 'gun', you can't even manage a fight like this? How pitiful!" Just as Myoznitnirn was chuckling.... a quite more muffled gun sounded.

Since when, Saito had been holding a handgun on his left hand, giving Myoznitnirn a shot. This was another item from the basement of Romalia.

Not only did Saito bring his AK, he also hid a small handgun. His change into a defensive posture was only to let Myoznitnirn's guard down.

Hit in the shoulder, Myoznitnirn knelt down.

Losing the control of Myoznitnirn, the statues around him collapsed to the deck like puppets cut from their strings.

Although the statues combatting the paladins in midair are on automation, since the ones on the deck are specially modified versions, without Myoznitnirn's support, they are rendered immobile. With a tired voice, Saito said "That's right... without a gun like this, I can't fight at all. Tell me, what makes you any different? Myoznitnirn"

Ignoring the moaning Myoznitnirn, Saito walked towards Joseph. Avoiding battles, at the bell tower at the back of the deck, Joseph was continuing his chant.

Stopping suddenly, he turned towards Saito. "How are you doing, Gandálfr"

"Toss the stone away or I'll open fire" Holding the handgun, Saito warned.

This man had certainly caused a lot of trouble in his life.

.....Incredibly, he could not bring himself to hate him. Logically, in his head, all the burning anger seemed to be directed at this man.

This man had forced, to him, to Tabitha, to the people of Halkenia, all sorts of paths already.

Tens of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands human lives had already died in his hands. The number of lives ruined by this man is still piling up.....

What kind of disgusting face would he have?

What kind of shameless attitude would he use with him?

Though long psychologically prepared for this....

Yet, all that could be seen on this man's face, was a sense of loneliness. Facing this hatred foe finally, Saito was confused.

The mad ruler shaking the stability of Halkenia again and again....

was this pathetic, pitiable person?

"How young. What's your age?" Asked of his age kindly, Saito unconsciously replied "Seventeen.... no, eighteen"

"You are honest to the degree where your eyes are shining. Although a different in looks, you are just like Charles."

"Throw away the stone!"

Of course, Joseph didn't take notice of him. All he did, was muttered, as if reminiscing something. "I was once just like you. I believed in my own justice, thinking I could solve all problems.... when I become just like everyone else, all my cowardice will disappear. Intellect, logic... what are these? I believed these are all things that will only confuse you"

Saito aimed at Joseph's hand. Joseph did not bother to continue his chant, but rather, continued "But, these were only my dreams. As I aged, they sank like residue. Dreams came to me, telling me to choose with my own hands, staining me with void. This is just like, a labyrinth. I am still yet to completely this labyrinth, I know...."

Saito pulled the trigger. The bullet sped towards Joseph, but that instant, Joseph disappeared.

"That toy, however many times you use, will never be my opponent" came Joseph's voice from behind.

Instinctively, Saito spun around and sliced thin air with Derflinger. Joseph had

disappeared again.

This time, Joseph moved to the stern of the ship.

Saito remembered, a line from Castlemont's letter.....

"Joseph.... transport instantly from his bedroom to the courtyard"

Because he was too concentrated in fighting, he had completely forgotten. Saito cursed his own clumsiness.

"This spell is called 'accelerate'. Also part of void. Why did God give this spell to me? How ironic. Sounds as if he's 'rushing' me himself."

Saito chased after Joseph, shooting with bullets, slashing with his sword. But every time, Joseph evaded with 'acceleration'. Attacks are all rendered useless. Facing an opponent exceeding speed a human is capable of, even Gandálfr is not his opponent.

Gradually, Saito's breathing became heavier and heavier.

"Looks bad.... partner. How unfortunate. Our opponent has a troublesome spell." Derflinger grumbled.

It remembered, the "body split" spell used in the battle of .

That spell was capable of splitting the body into multiple clones. A pretty handy spell, because even if there were more opponents, they would all be in the range of his weapon's attack range.

On the other hand.... Joseph's spell is different. If capable of teleporting, "weapons" are hardly useful.

"Very interesting, young man. It was nice meeting you, but I have my work to do. It's time it ended." Joseph drew out his dagger. The dagger glowed with a glamorous gleam, sending shivers down Saito's spine. Claimed as the master of all weapons, feeling fear towards a simple dagger.

Able to defeat strong spells and magical instruments, yet so helpless against such a dagger.

"Speed". Crushed by the lack of this ability, it was the cause of Gandálfr's powerlessness.

"Ohh boy"

Although capable of many times the reflexes of an average person through Gandálfr's power, he is still unable to stop the dagger. Despite knowing very well, Saito shut his eyes.

"Oh, about give up? Well, is more swift"

"Whoa, partner? How are you going to fight with your eyes closed?"

"In my world, there's something called the 'third eye'! Come at me, Joseph! I'll see through your actions with my third eye!" Saito raised himself to the utmost sensitivity. Prepared for the single "instant" the will come....

"Fascinating. Then if you will allow me"

Joseph's breath neared.

Aiming at that point, Saito slashed out...

The feel of the hard, sharp blade going deep into his stomach.... Saito was forced to open his eyes.

"What an incredible eye" came Joseph's voice from the left. On the side of Saito's stomach, held Joseph's dagger tightly. The slash Saito delivered with closed eyes didn't even touch Joseph's shirt. Easily, Joseph stabbed Saito from the side.

The pain from the dull sword leaked all his energy from his body. However, Saito forced a smile. Even one short second was more than enough.

That's right.

What he was counting on, was not his third eye by lashing out in the unknown, but the single second when stabbed, in broad daylight.

"Caught you" With this, he grabbed Joseph's hand.

Third eye or not, it was all a fallacy. If you can't catch something with both eyes open, how would it be possible to catch with both of them closed. Besides, that kind of thing, Saito never had it to begin with. Whichever situation it is, it should be done with wide open eyes, analyzed logically, with hopes for success.

Using Derflinger in his right hand, Saito stabbed Joseph on his left..... But, Joseph's expressions were just as calm.

Saito's body was in paralysis, right that moment.

It's all over!

Like poisoned, arms failing from an indescribable loss of power, Derflinger dropped from his right hand. The other released Joseph weakly. Saito bended his knees, dropping to the deck.

The miscalculated paralysis and pain from his failure spread in his mouth....

Blocked by flocks of statues, whether it's the wind dragon or Paladins, none of them will be able to stop Joseph's chant.

Joseph raised his wand.

Below scurrying franticly, was a hundred and fifty thousand army..... a hundred and fifty humans. Imagine them, their looks when turned to ashes. The look when all is burnt, all is returned to ashes.....

..... but he was not moved.

Not at all.

He eyed the fallen teenager with disorienting breathing patterns out of his eye.

Even when stabbed in the stomach, even when the toxins have spread all over his body, the furious flames never disappeared from his eyes.

The teenager bit his lips.

It seemed like he was regretting being unable to stop Joseph.

Walking near Saito, Joseph stepped on the dagger, piercing it further into Saito's abdomen.

"Ah...." The pains were too unbearable to cry out anymore.

"Do you wish you could better?"

"Yes.... I wish I could do better. I was unable to stop countless people from being murdered...." With tearless weeps, Saito said while frowning.

"How does it feel? Maybe you could have won just now, but there is only the taste despair. You are unable to protect what you were supposed to protect, and die in despair"

Saito pushed his paralyzed body to its limit, crawling inch by inch, reaching his hand towards the handgun dropped on the floor. Joseph kicked it to the other end of the deck.

"What a kid, still trying to make a move on me. Shining eyes believing

everything you do is right. How admiring. Charles, I.... what am I doing. Why, why did I turn into this. If we can return to the past.... I'd love to. If we can return to those times, I'd really want to start over again"

"It's too late.... I can never find my way out of this labyrinth"

Joseph finished his spell. Right the moment he was about to throw the "fire jewel" off board..... the "ruby ring of Earth" emitted dazzling light.

"Eh?"

From the tea-colored ring, "memories" flowed into Joseph's mind.

Suddenly, Joseph was thrown into the dream world.

Something seems off.... is this a dream?

Well, anyway, what was in front of him, was the Palace of Versailles, a room inside Grand Troyes.

"Isn't this father's office?"

Yes, it was exactly father's office. From the looks of the furniture, it seems that father have just died recently.

"What's this? What kind of joke is this?"

He was about to use "explosion", turning all the army below, everything into ashes.....

Then, why did he come here?

Well, there's no need to hurry. This place is full of memories. Just as he was wondering why he would possess these feelings, came someone's footsteps. Joseph hid immediately behind the drapes, following his instinct that he won't be discovered here.

Seeing the person appear, Joseph widened his eyes. That person was..... Charles. The own brother he killed.

".....Charles"

Joseph talked to himself, dumbfounded. The instant he saw the other, the question of why would he be here is already long gone.

What's Charles doing, running to father's office? Moreover, him wearing a hazy expression. Never ever seeing this expression from Charles, Joseph seemed slightly shocked.

Charles did not seem to discover the Joseph hiding behind the drapes. Violently pulling on the desk's drawer, all the things in the drawer piled on the floor.

His father's ruby, stamp, documents, all spread across the floor. Kneeling on top of them, Charles began choking softly.

He was weeping.

Why? Why would he weep? Joseph felt a sudden urge to jump out and ask him. But.... the answer was soon given, from Charles's mouth itself.

".....Why? Why isn't it me?"

What did you say?

"Father, why am I not King? This is too weird, my magic is dozen times stronger than that of brother's, even your subjects support me. But.....why? Why! I don't get it!" Charles picked up a ring. It was the legendary treasury passed on through generations of Gallian Kings..... the ruby of Earth. Joseph quickly looked at his hand. The same ruby was emitting light off his finger.

This....what's going on?

At this moment.....a voice rang in his head.

"Joseph your highness"

This voice, Joseph has heard of it before.

"Pope? Vittorio? It's you! This is some sort of trick from you!"

"You are by all means mistaken. This is no trick. This is exactly what happened. I'm merely guiding that piece of memory out"

"What?"

"This is my void spell"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"This is 'record'. All strong memories stored in objects.... I should say, thoughts, will be displayed clearly in your mind. This show is exactly the memory from the ruby of Earth from your hands"

"How foolish. If you wanted to stop me, you could have killed me"

"Your soul will never be saved then"

"You're saying this is the actual events that happened? Impossible!"

"If this is.... If you are a void user just like me, then you should understand whether this is true or not. Is this an illusion created by magic? Or did this really happen?"

Joseph focused his mind. So that's why..... this was most certainly true. All the vision in front of him, were events that happened in the past. Without words, Joseph understood by feel.

A riot started to stir in Joseph's heart.

Did this really happen?

Then.... the Charles in front of him, is the "real" Charles?

This Charles was not concerned about his surroundings, pressing the ring with both hands against his chest, crying once more again. Seeing this scene, for a moment Joseph had completely forgotten the existence of the Pope himself.

Joseph was mesmerized by the Charles in front of him.....

"Father, did you know, how much effort I put, just to prove myself better than brother. How much hard work I put into places people could never see. All for today, all for today!"

Joseph understood. This..... was an event that happened right before their father

died. That day, father called the both of them to his bed, and told them "the next king shall be Joseph". Immediately afterwards, Charles smiled, not a slightest bit concerned, and told Joseph "If brother can become King, that would be the greatest thing ever. I love my brother so much. I will always support you. Let's make this country even more beautiful together"

Back then, towards his words, Joseph held no suspicion at all. He truly believed it was Charles's thoughts. His pure small self was completely corrupted by the events that happened afterwards, triggering intense anger in his smaller self, finally leading to murdering Charles personally.

To hide his jealousy, Charles resisted disobedience.....

Tears poured in Joseph's eyes. Before he knew it, he had already stepped forward.

".....Brother"

Charles's face was twisted in shock, then panicked.

"No.... no, I'm just organizing father's things when I accidentally....."

"There's no need to say anymore" Joseph hugged his younger brother's shoulders, using his most gentle voice.

"Brother....."

Knowing that he had been completely seen through, it finally twisted Charles's straight face into a one raining tears.

"I'm sorry, I could not accept it. No matter what, I won't accept it. Why am I not king? Father why, why was I not chosen king? I really don't understand. How much effort I gave, neither brother nor fathers knows right. I did so much....."

"I know, I know. Therefore, don't cry, Charles. I also think, no matter how it is, the one most suitable for King are you. It's because your magic is so much more powerful than that of mine"

"Brother, brother...."

"That's why, I give you my throne. Father's words, only you and me know. It's nothing important. You will be the king, I will you your advisor, assisting you. How's that? Charles, this is good, no?" Joseph reassured Charles slowly.

"Brother, I'm sorry. I am a hopeless person. I was the one who disturbed our retainer. I secretly bribed royal subjects. Brothers never did anything like this..... I...."

"Shhhh. It's alright. I'm just like you. This is more than enough for me. It's alright, don't say anymore" Saying this from the bottom of his heart, Joseph felt immediately relieved. After a couple minutes of contemplation, he discovered that this was joy.

"Together, let's make Gallia a better place. Charles, let's make the world more beautiful" Tears running across his cheek, Joseph said once more "Together, let's make Gallia a better place" "Together, let's make this world more beautiful" "Together, we can do it" "Charles" "Charles"

From Joseph's palm, the 'jewel of fire' silently rolled away. Kneeling down on the ground, Joseph covered his face with both hands.

"Charles..... we were really the most foolish brothers possible on this world"

Realizing he was crying, Joseph smiled.

"What, am I not crying? Hahaahaa..... all the hatred finally found their exit, it's so simple, so ironic" Tears seemed as hot as fire.... layer by layer it unwrapped Joseph's heart.

When Tabitha finally got past the Paladins, arriving with a flying spell, all had already finished.

On the small vessel, there Joseph was, sitting on the decks, surrounded by Paladins. Next to him, she found the bandaged Saito, draining her face of color.

Louise looked worriedly at Saito. Only after Henrietta healed his wounds with water magic did Tabitha let go of her breath.

Paladins surrounding Joseph confirmed Tabitha's identity and made way. With a rigid expression, Tabitha walked to her hated uncle.

Lying there...., was as if a new Joseph, with the devil within driven away. Carrying on his face, was deep satisfaction.

"Is it Charlotte?" Joseph asked softly, lifting his head.

"That looks very good on you, I trust Charles must also be happily in heaven" Sighed Joseph when he saw Tabitha dressed in royal clothing. Tabitha was held back. What in the world happened to her uncle?

It was as if it's another person, his radiant expression. Joseph took off his crown, and put it down near Tabitha's foot.

"For a long time, I have given you enough trouble. I really am sorry. Although this is hardly enough..... please accept it. This was your father's to begin with. And... your mother, in the church of Versailles is an elf. You should have met him before. Before I came, I gave that guy one last order, to brew an antidote. This way your mother should be able to return normal"

"......what happened?"

"I won't say. This is about your father's reputation. But it's over. It's all over. I have no more desire to see hell. All's left, is for you to relief me of my misery. That'll be all" Joseph laughed. Afterwards, in front of Tabitha, Joseph stretched out his neck.

"Take this head of mine. Only then will everything really end."

Tabitha didn't really understand the cause of the change in her uncle. But.... like he said, "It’s all over". Regardless of what happened, Joseph's aims were satisfied.

Anyhow, this is the head of the sworn enemy who murdered her father..... the one she had wanted to cut off so badly, was right in front of her eyes. This is an undeniable fact.

"Say, what, exactly happened?"

But Joseph wouldn't say, only waiting with a stretched out neck.

Tabitha's shook her head. With a cold furious yell forced from her throat, "What,

exactly happened!"

Paladins hurried Tabitha. "Please, hurry....."

Tabitha raised her wand. Paladins all took a step backwards. With a cold face, Tabitha began chanting.

But.... her spell was stopped halfway.

She found herself staring back at Saito, who had been looking at her all along.

"Not in front of this person, don't want to kill" This kind of thought echoed in her mind. Shaking her head, Louise told Tabitha "Tabitha.... please. Put your wand down. Revenge won't solve anything"

Silently observing all along, Agnes also interrupted "....She's got a point. You are about to become the Queen of Gallia. There's no need to dirty your hands. This man, you should trial him with law. Otherwise, you'll always be dragged behind by an endless chain"

The paladins glared at both of them, scolding "We don't need you to poke noses in these matters. There's no end to trouble if you don't put an end to it."

"What are you talking about! Do you want Tabitha to become a cold murderer? How is that any different from this man! Killing people with your own hands for your own goals...."

A rather old Paladin stepped forward "Ladies of Tristain, this is different. Charlotte her highness is here to rule the future country. Therefore she must cut all loose ends"

"That's just sophistry!"

The Paladins began quibbling with Louise.

"All of you shut up!"

Quiet until now, Saito's voice interrupted this fight. All of the people looked at Saito in unison.

"Tabitha is not seeking revenge for the followers of God, or the people who've died! I..... although I'm not sure myself, but isn't revenge a personal matter? You are only doing it because of your own feelings no? This has nothing to do at all, whether she will become Joseph the second or is it her future rule over this country." After finishing, Saito limped forward on the deck. Henrietta hurriedly came forth to assist him. Although the water magic have already cleansed most of the toxins, there were still a little left in his body, making his wound hurt.

The whole audience held their breath. Saito let go of Henrietta's hand, wobbling slowly towards Tabitha and told her honestly in the eyes "Do it, if you really want to, then do however you like"

Louise immediately complained towards Saito "What kind of nonsense are you talking about!"

Painfully, Saito stood up straight "Please stop it. This is Tabitha's private matters. Whether she eventually chooses for revenge or to give up, it should all be decided by Tabitha. Perhaps her father will not be happy in heaven, perhaps she will dirty her hands. Perhaps she will get nothing out of revenge, but all of this is Tabitha's choice, not ours." Saito made it out clearly.

"Make your decision, Tabitha. Whichever it is, I will always respect your choice"

Tabitha slowly raised her staff.... chanting her spell. An ice spear conjured before the staff, but did not move a tiny little bit. Her hand was frozen, motionless.

Perhaps she really is having her revenge, but unless she herself is the executor.....

Seeing Tabitha put down her staff, Saito let go of his breath.

In the end..... the one who put a full stop to this was, Myoznitnirn. When no one was noticed her, she quietly jumped from the corner of the deck, picking up the dagger on the floor, suddenly stabbing into Joseph's chest.

Fresh blood spilled from Joseph's mouth; Henrietta screamed. The nearest paladin tried to grab her, but Myoznitnirn held out the "jewel of fire".

"Don't move. I am the familiar of void. I am the Myoznitnirn who can control all

Magical Items. I can make this 'jewel of fire' explode"

"C-calm down.." A paladin trembled, but Myoznitnirn paid no attention. She pressed close to Joseph's bloody lips, finally kissing on it.

After the lips overlapping for a while.... Myoznitnirn retreated. From her mouth painted with Joseph's blood, Myoznitnirn's voice could be heard "The two of us kissing, it's the first time since our 'contract'. Joseph my lord..... why didn't you look at me at all even until the end? Why didn't you care about me? I am only a normal woman, all I want is this....."

Joseph did not reply. With a pleased face, his breathing stopped.

Never looking away Joseph's face, Myoznitnirn announced: "Get out of here. Let us be together."

Scared to death, all the paladins leapt on their pegasi with little encouragement. Saito and the others also rode on top of Slipheed.

Tabitha stared a while at the void master and familiar.

Saito seemed to want to say something to Tabitha, but was stopped by Louise.

Next, Tabitha turned around, leaping onto Slipheed herself. No one made any noise.

Slipheed fled from the ship.

In the distant sky, Saito spotted a white wind dragon. It's Julio's Azuro. On its back, Pope Vittorio's long white hat could be seen. Saito frowned.

The person who changed Joseph's mind was that guy's magic.

Most likely...."void".

With only a single spell, he changed Joseph's mind.

What a fearsome person. Joseph and Myoznitnirn's vessel ascended rapidly. When they were finally a dot..... it was suddenly consumed by a gigantic explosion and flames, and was no more.

Tabitha stared at that ball of flames, watching it die out.

Before she knew it, tears had already squeezed out of her eyes.

"Father" In her mind, Tabitha told her father "It's all over, father. He's dead"

Tabitha knew, that between her father and Joseph, was something she had no right to interfere with. That should be, the cause of Joseph's love and hatred to her father.

And it's scarred very deeply.

The reason Joseph murdered her father..... was because of something unavoidable. She may not ever understand it for the rest of her life, and there is probably no way to know either....

Despite so, she does not plan to forgive Joseph. Even when she knew why, she wouldn't stop seeking revenge.

Yet, tears kept pouring. Why? Probably another reason that cannot be understood for the rest of her life either.

"I, will never forget this fireball." Looking at the crown in her hands, realizing no one could put a stop to her endless tears.

Epilogue

"See for yourselves, everyone. This is the absolute real crown of Joseph. The gigantic explosion just now, was none other than the good deeds of Joseph. He had allied with the elves and created this kind of hellish fire.... he completely annhiliated the dual use fleet. Not only so, he also wanted you to go down with it" Facing the Gallian army, Vittorio continued his speech. Taking out Joseph's crown just now, Vittorio began to persuade the Gallian armies.

After all, isn't Joseph's crown the best proof.

Slowly, even the most stubborn Gallian soldiers, began to recall rumours of Joseph allying with elves, starting to be pursuaded bit by bit.

"But, this mad king, has already been called back by the Gods. More ironically, using the fireball explosion he created....if this is not the punishment from God, what else could it be?"

Suddenly hearing news of Joseph's death, the Gallian army expressed their disbelief towards Vittorio's speech. To confirm the genuinity of Vittorio's news would certainly require quite a bit of time. Not long afterwards, contact from Lutece was established, knowledge of Joseph boarding the speedboat alone obtained.

With things already at this stage, there is now little reason to fight. Their king was already dead. And he even tried to perish every single one of them along with the Romalian army.....

Not a single soldier was left loyal to Joseph.

The Gallian army finally held back their spears and surrendered to the Romalian army. Vittorio's speech continued. "Please relax. I have no desire to condemn you all, nore to treat you as fugitives. Since every one of you is part of the glorious member of the Gallian Empire, we are all friends in front of God. The

'crusade' was only used to describe the Joseph swallowed by that humongous fireball, not on any one of you...."

Saito found Vittorio's words irritating.

"Who is our real enemy? It's the elven heretics! They were the ones supporting the incompetent king, terrorizing the whole world!"

Tiffania nervously pulled her hat lower. Saito nodded towards Tiffania. Although still wounded, it has already recovered to a degree where Saito is capable of moving around. Towards the healing magic of the royal personel, Saito could not help but express his awe.

"It's alright. We won't let that guy get away with it"

"But in the end, it all went according to Romalia's plans" Louise mentioned coldly.

"Huh, that guy was about to change Joseph's mind with only one spell. We must be really cautious from now on" Saito said

"Is that true?"

"Mhm, I saw it with my own eyes. Joseph was in the middle of chanting 'explosion', just as he was about to cast it upon the 'fire jewel'..... there he stood, not moving a muscle. I'm sure it was that moment when he casted some sort of spell"

"Welll, thanks to him, we're all saved now"

"Although that's true, but everything went accordingly to how that guy planned, it kind of pisses me off."

"How troublesome. He really knows how to put up an act. This pope, perhaps he may really make this 'crusade' a success" Guiche muttered dreamily.

"Hey, Guiche!" Given a stern stare from Saito, Guiche turned around.

"Oh I was just joking. That giant fireball.... elven magic? What a joke! How can our founders possibly fight with people who can make things as terrifying as

that!"

"If anything goes wrong in the Pope's plan, it should be exactly this" Kirche voiced her thoughts.

"What do you mean?"

"Both Romallia and Gallia, a hundred and fifty thousand men, witnessed the power of the elves at such a close distance. No matter how charismatic the Pope is, how do you suppose he convince all of these people to dig their own graves?"

"There's another factor as well" Louise suggested "To revive the true power of the void, we need all four void users. But since the Gallia's void user and familiar died together, there's only the three of us left. This was we can't win against the elves"

That's right! How could they have forgotten about this! The girls burst out in laughter after realisation.

.....Saito thought otherwise. Joseph's death should also be in Vittorio's calculations, wasn't that how Julio said? "That king will never join us"

If so, there must also be a plan to continue the Crusade without his help.

It must be like that.

"Well, so that's that! Our crusade is over! Leave the rest for Romalia! If asked, just say, sorry, we don't have any more funds for an expedition~~! Besides the terror of the Gallian king has already ended! Let's return home~~ return home! Enjoy ourselves with Saito's hard earned money, all of us!"

Hearing Guiche's suggestions, all the Water Spirit Ondine Knights laughed brightly. Saito was also clapped on the back, shaking his head in chuckles. Vittorio's plans is still yet to end, is still yet to be uncovered, they must not let down their guard.

Plus, Saito's power was hardly useful. Castlemont already especially warned him "be careful" previously.... but he got carried away and completely forgot about the existance of Joseph's spell.

If it weren't for the Pope's "void", perhaps he would have perished along with the a hundred and fifty thousand men, turned to nothing but ashes.

There's a lot more even powerful people ahead....

But then Saito remembered *I have my friends*

and.... Louise.

Saito put his hands on Louise's shoulders. "Now we never have to worry about that guy's intentions anymore"

"so true"

"Leave it to me. If he dare come near us again, I will definitely stop him. Next time I won't be so careless. oh and also, we should go buy a house, the comfortable kind"

Malicorne poured them tea "Don't about lemon gardens"

Louise blushed red immediately.

"Hey hey, lemon gardens, no thanks" Just as Saito was finished with his sentence, Louise kicked relentlessly towards his butt.

"Ow! I am a patient, you know!"

"Who told you to make decisions on your own!"

"Are you going to keep arguing that with me"

Towards the already heated couple, Malicorne fuelled them even more. "Stop! we must all be at peace~~!"

"Go peace yourself! I'm serious about it!" Bellowed Louise furiously. Malicorne pointed out attentively "Eh? Why didn't you kick him in between the legs, but on his butt? A word of the wise from the wisps of the wind, if it's between the legs, there won't be anymore lemon-chan, no?"

Taking a deep breath, Louise swung her leg between Saito's. Hit right in the spot, Saito rolled on the floor "You... stop kicking other people"

"I've already spared you from even worse!" After bellowing again, Louise's face turned redder. So that's why, although she did kick him, it didn't actually hurt much.

Their mates couldn't breathe from the continuous laughter.

Lying on the floor, Saito thought, with the help of these mates..... even if it's another one of Romalia's plans, they may be able to stop it. Definitely.

"Great! Anyway, let's drink for a continuous 3 nights!" Saito raised his arm. Cheers flew everywhere.

But soon, this atmosphere was soon shattered by Kirche's words "But, what about Tabitha? Is she really going to become Gallia's Queen? From the looks of her just now, it doesn't seems like she have much choice anymore....."

In an instant, everyone exchanged looks.

Oh right.

And then there's that question.

Why did Tabitha suddenly decide to accept the coronation?

"Don't tell me she really wanted to become a puppet of Romalia?" Reinard muttered. Everyone began to worry.

After Pope Vittorio's speech, Tabitha's interrupted coronation was continued. The crown of Joseph displayed just now, was immediately used in the coronation.

In the tents behind the stage, Tabitha held her hands tightly. She was thinking the words Saito said just now

"Make your decision, Tabitha. Whichever it is, I will always respect your choice"

Would a teen who is able to say things like this, encourage Tabitha to wear the crown?

"Impossible" The calm part of Tabitha's mind told her so.

Which means, the Saito who has been running around these two days..... was not the real Saito. It was only part of Romalia's conspiracy just to make Tabitha wear the crown.

It's some sort of magic..... no, the intelligent Tabitha already knew

"skirni"

Using it herself before, it's an ancient puppet spell. Through blood, it creates a dummy the same as the real person.

Tabitha was enraged. Like her nickname "Snowstorm", anyone in close vicinity could completely feel the icy anger in with.

"Those guys, made use of my.....first"

Julio marched into the tent. "The preperation is ready, Princess Charlotte. This is the last time I'll be able to call you a 'Princess'"

Nodding, Tabitha stood up "I'll perform for you now"

Just like what you wished for.....

Tabitha savoured the title she had once.

Knight of the North Parterre.

"I'll tell you who you are conspirating against next"

Slowly, Tabitha walked towards the sunlight and cheers of joy.